

Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.  
 □ Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἠσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ·  
 (Ἰερεὶά) ἀποστείλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσ-  
 ὤπου σου,  
 ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου.  
 φωτὴ βδώντος ἐν τῇ ἑρήμῳ·  
 ἐτοιμάσεται τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου,  
 εὐθείας ποιεῖται τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ·  
 ἵ ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης (βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἑρήμῳ καὶ) κη-  
 ρύσσειν βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρ-  
 τιῶν. καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία  
 τώρα καὶ οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται (πάντες, καὶ ἐβαπτί-  
 ζοντο) ὅπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ὁ ποταμὸς ἐξομο-  
 λογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν. (καὶ ἦν) ὁ Ἰωάννης  
 ἐνδεδυμένος τριχῆς καμήλου, καὶ ζώην δερματίνην  
 περὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσθων ἀκρίδας καὶ  
 μέλι ἀγρίου. καὶ ἐκήρυσεν λέγων· \* ἔρχεται ὁ  
 ἰσχυρότερός μου ὀπίσω [μου], οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανός  
 ὁ κύριος λῆσαι τὸν ἱμάντα τῶν ὑποδημάτων αὐτοῦ.  
 Ἐγὼ ἐβάπτισα ὑμᾶς ὕδατι, αὐτὸς δὲ βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς  
 πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

# Bible Book Study for ADULT TEACHERS



July • August • September • 1987

## REVELATION

Library of Tim Servati  
Donated by Pat Corliss from the library  
of her brother-in-law and minister,  
Charles Sumner

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**July, August, September 1987**

**Volume 9, Number 4**

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## ENDING AND BEGINNING

*Luther Garden*

Our present study plan for the Bible Book Series will be completed with this quarter's study of the Book of Revelation. We have made several changes in our usual format for this issue only. These enable us to devote more space to comments on the text of Revelation. Please take notice of additional resources on Revelation listed on pages 10-11. Also, we urge you to read the introduction to the study beginning on page 12. There we explain the objective we seek to accomplish in this study of Revelation.

Next quarter (October-December 1987) we will begin another nine-year study of the Bible in the Bible Book Series, starting with Genesis. We hope that experience gained during our first nine years of the Bible Book Series will be reflected in the quality of our study materials for the next nine years. A chart of the next nine-year plan is included on page 9 of this periodical.

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# Helps for Class Leaders

Ruth Ann Wade

Circulate To:

- \_\_\_ Teacher
- \_\_\_ Outreach Leader
- \_\_\_ Activities Leader
- \_\_\_ Secretary
- \_\_\_ Group Leaders

A call for help can be an SOS. On board a ship that could mean Save Our Ship. In a Sunday School class it could mean more than one thing. SOS could mean Save Our Souls which is the true heart's need of the millions of unsaved, unchurched adults in our nation. Does your class really believe that the Bible contains the only way to salvation and eternal life? that Christ IS the way, the truth and the light? Is it evident in their daily life-style that Jesus has first place in their lives and they are a constant witness to that fact both verbally and by example? Does your class leadership team model a caring, nurturing, ministering, growing Christian example that will lead class members and prospects to a saving faith? SOS should indeed mean Save Our Souls.

SOS could also stand for Same Old Stuff. Has each Sunday morning class session become a dull routine of the Same Old Stuff that has lost its enthusiasm and spiritual development possibilities? Do you function as class leaders out of a sense of duty and drudgery or do you arrive on Sunday morning expecting wonderful things to happen? Your excitement and expectation for Sunday School is directly related to the preparation through visitation, ministry, prayer, Bible study and planning that has taken place during the week.

Let's do an SOS (Same Old Stuff) check up to be sure you are on target toward the main goal of Sunday School—SOS (*SAVE OUR SOULS*)

**Teachers**—This is last quarter of the church year.

1. Have you visited in the home of each class member (both absentees and faithful attenders) this year?
2. Do you know the spiritual condition of each of your members and prospects?
3. Do you have any unsaved adults on your class roll?
4. Do you have a written prayer list of each member's life needs that you use regularly as you pray and prepare each Sunday's Bible study?
5. Have you given the names of potential leaders from your class to the

- nominating committee as they seek workers for the new church year?
6. Has your class attendance grown to the point that it would be wise to create a new unit so that growth may continue?

**Outreach Leaders**—You have only three months left in this church year.

1. Have you enrolled all the prospects for your class?
2. Has someone in your class contacted and cultivated every prospect in your file?
3. As you look at your enrollment do you need to form some new groups (which means enlisting additional group leaders) so that you can adequately minister to each member and prospect?
4. Does the Sunday School Outreach Director have plans to conduct, along with Adult Division and Adult Department Leadership, *Adult Growth Week*? It is a marvelous tool to guide adults into making choices about organization designed to grow numerically and evangelistically.

**Activities Leader**—

1. Do you have some fellowship activities planned for this quarter? (a) You may have some members who will be promoted to another class at the end of this church year. You could honor them for their contributions to your class. (b) You may have class members accepting leadership responsibilities during the next church year. A “commissioning service” would be nice for them along with a pledge of prayer support and to continue them on your Members-in-Service roll to be sure to include them in fellowship times with their age-group. (c) You may have new members being promoted into your class in the Fall. Now would be a nice time to invite them to a class fellowship meeting so they can begin to get better acquainted and feel more comfortable in Bible study in your class in October.
2. What church activities should your class members be aware of to participate in and to be conscious of possible prospects for your class? (a) Has your class or adult division conducted an Adult Vacation Bible School? (Materials available through Literature Order form or Baptist Book Store) (b) Has the church sponsored Backyard Bible Clubs? (Materials available through Literature Order form or Baptist Book Store) Parents of children enrolled in these could be prospects for your class. (c) Is your church conducting Outreach Bible Studies (Materials available from Materials Services or Baptist Book stores) during lunch breaks at work, in apartment complexes, or in neighborhood homes? If so, there may be some possible prospects for your class that need cultivating.



(d) Will your church have On-to-College Day (Materials available from National Student Ministries or State Student Departments) for the students going away to colleges and universities? Will your class membership be involved in these plans as students or as parents or grandparents of students?

(e) Is your church a "campus church"? If so your class may need to assist in activities on "Student-Join-the-Church Day" and in an Adopt-a-Student program.

(f) Single Adult Awareness Sunday is in September. Your class may have Single Adult members involved in the plans and activities that need the encouragement and support of the class. Even if your class has all married members they should be urged to become informed about the contributions Single Adults make to your church and the ways Single Adults can be encouraged and made to feel a part of the Family of God.

(g) The State Missions Day in the Sunday School could be a time for your class, perhaps even with the cooperation of every class in the department, to become aware of mission needs in your state. You could lead everyone to select a missions project located near your church where your group could have a "hands-on experience" of helping others and sharing the wonderful gospel message. Such an activity can do wonders to develop a genuine Koinonia fellowship in a class.

**Secretary**—Your faithfulness in maintaining a good record system cannot be emphasized enough. All of the plans and activities that the class is involved in will be affected by the records that are kept. Adequate, up-to-date information about each member and prospect is vital to being able to contact them concerning Bible study attendance and fellowship, outreach or ministry projects. You are the all-important communication connection to all class leaders and to the department or general officers of the Sunday School.

**Group Leaders**—In this last quarter of the church year you need to evaluate your leadership to each member of your group.

- (1) Is a member a potential class leader or Sunday School worker for the new church year? (If so tell your teacher and/or the nominating committee)
- (2) Is there an unsaved person in your group? Are you praying regularly for them? Is someone cultivating a relationship with them so there will be an opportunity to share with them the good news of Jesus Christ?
- (3) Is there a person on your group that you have not been able to reach?

Would it be wise to let someone else in the class try to minister to them this quarter?

- (4) Do you have a group member who should promote to another class in October? You may need to begin helping them develop "connections" in that class so that the transition will not be too traumatic. Your job responsibility is the church's vital lifeline link to its membership and prospects. You may be the only person a new church member or prospect gets to know at first.

### **Class Meeting Suggestions**

**July**—You may want the class to join in a church-wide event for the Fourth of July. One of the tasks of the Sunday School is to inform members about church and denominational events. Encourage participation by contacting all members and prospects. Make plans to provide transportation and/or host/hostess arrangements for all new members or prospects that may need it.

Be sure to stay in touch with members about vacation plans. Encourage Sunday School attendance wherever they go. Pray for traveling mercies and a safe return with a rested, renewed spirit for each member and prospect.

**August**—This month your class could gather to cut watermelon or make homemade ice cream. Be sure to include your Members-in-Service and perhaps this would be a good time to begin to get acquainted with persons who should be promoting into your class in October. Invite them to your class meeting and plan a get-acquainted activity that will help everyone get to know each other. (Class leaders, review your check-list in these "Helps for Class Leaders" for ideas of any class administrative tasks that may need to be handled at the class meeting to save the time on Sunday Morning for all the Bible Study possible).

**September**—This would be a good month to plan some way for the class to show appreciation for your teacher and other class leaders for their faithful leadership and work during the church year. The class meeting would also be the time to complete the organization to begin the new church year in October. If the Leadership Team is completed at the class meeting they can finish the organization of groups at a Weekly Workers' Meeting. Planning a calendar during September of fellowships, socials, training and ministry projects for the new church year would mean the new year could begin more effectively and more growth could take place.

I hope God is pleased with your efforts in your class. Contact your state Sunday School office or the Baptist Sunday School Board if we can assist you in your work.

# BIBLE BOOK SERIES

9 YEAR PLAN					First Cycle		Second Cycle		Third Cycle	
1987-88	Oct.-Dec.	Jan.-Mar.	Apr.-June	July-Sept.						
	Genesis	Genesis	Matthew	Matthew						
1988-89	Exodus	Acts	Acts	Leviticus Numbers						
1989-90	1, 2 Thessalonians Galatians	Joshua Judges	Hebrews James	Ruth 1 Samuel						
1990-91	Luke	Luke	2 Samuel (1 Chron.)	1 Kings (2 Chron. 1--20)						
1991-92	1 Corinthians	Amos Hosea Jonah	2 Corinthians Philemon	2 Kings (2 Chron. 21--36) Micah						
1992-93	Romans	Psalms	Isaiah	1,2 Peter 1,2,3 John Jude						
1993-94	Deuteronomy	John	John	Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon						
1994-95	Ephesians Philippians	Habakkuk Jeremiah Lamentations	Mark	Ezekiel Daniel						
1995-96	Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Colossians 1,2 Timothy Titus	Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	Revelation						

# RESOURCES

The following publications are suggested as sources of additional help for teachers of lessons in this quarterly. Prices listed may change without notice.

*Bible Book Study Commentary, July—September, 1987.* Nashville: Convention Press, 1987. \$3.05.

*Biblical Illustrator, Summer 1987.* Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1987. \$1.99. (See *Illustrator* contents page.)

Blevins, James. *Revelation as Drama.* Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984. \$6.95.

Draper, James T., Jr. *The Unveiling.* Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984. \$8.95.

Hobbs, Herschel H. *The Cosmic Drama: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation.* Waco: Word Books, 1971.

Ironside, H. A. *Lectures on the Book of Revelation.* Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, Thirty-sixth Printing, 1982. \$9.25.

Ladd, George E. *A Commentary on the Revelation of John.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972. \$5.95.

Newport, John P. *The Lion and the Lamb.* Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985. \$11.95.



# Bible Book Resource Kit Contents

*Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* is designed to supplement and expand the teaching procedures contained in *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers*. Each item is referred to in "Teaching the Lesson" in *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers*.

- Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation
- Item 2—"FOR NEXT WEEK" Assignment Slips
- Item 3—Map: First-Century Roman World
- Item 4—Values to Be Gained from Studying Revelation
- Item 5—Commendations and Condemnation
- Item 6—Chart: The Worthiness of God
- Item 7—Commitment Slips
- Item 8—Chart: The Worthiness of God
- Item 9—Poster: Time Relationship of Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls
- Item 10—Poster: Four Events of Revelation 10—11
- Item 11—Group Assignments: Discussing the Two Witnesses
- Item 12—Poster: Revelation 11:15
- Item 13—Poster: Questions About the Beast
- Item 14—Poster: Revelation 12:11-12
- Item 15—Strips: Discover Spiritual Characteristics of the 144,000
- Item 16—Word Strips: Revelation 14:14-16
- Item 17—Picture: Megiddo
- Item 18—Poster: The Characteristics of Babylon
- Item 19—Study Guide: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb
- Item 20—Poster: The Characteristics of Babylon
- Item 21—Strips: Some Aspects of the Millennial Views
- Item 22—Poster: The Great White Throne Judgment
- Item 23—Group Assignments
- Item 24—Poster: Blessings and Description of the New Jerusalem
- Item 25—Sentence Poster

## Outline

- I. Opening Visions and Letters to the Seven Churches (1:1 to 5:14)
    - A. John's Vision of Jesus Christ (1:1-20)
    - B. Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1 to 3:22)
    - C. The Vision of God's Throne (4:1 to 5:14)
  - II. Opening Seven Seals, Blowing Seven Trumpets (6:1 to 11:19)
    - A. Seals of Judgment and Assurance for the Saved (6:1 to 7:17)
    - B. Six Trumpets Announce Judgment and Woes (8:1 to 9:21)
    - C. The Little Book and the Two Witnesses (10:1 to 11:19)
  - III. The Great Wonder and the Seven Vials (12:1 to 16:21)
    - A. The Dragon's War on the Woman (12:1 to 13:18)
    - B. Salvation and Judgment Proclaimed from Heaven (14:1-20)
    - C. Seven Vials of God's Judgment (15:1 to 16:21)
  - IV. Final Triumph and the New Jerusalem (17:1 to 22:21)
    - A. The Fall of Babylon (17:1 to 18:24)
    - B. The Victorious Christ (19:1-21)
    - C. The Millennium and the Final Judgment (20:1-15)
    - D. The New Jerusalem (21:1 to 22:21)
- (Suggested Memory Verses: 1:3; 2:7b; 3:20; 5:12; 21:3-4,23; 22:12,17)

# REVELATION

## Introduction

**T**he first lesson in this quarter's study (July 5) is intended to serve as an introduction to the Book of Revelation, including its historical setting. Therefore, our purpose in this introductory article is to clarify the plan that we will follow this quarter in our study of Revelation.

We want to emphasize the message of Christian hope, encouragement, and judgment which all interpreters see in Revelation. At the same time, we want to acknowledge and deal respectfully and fairly with different points of view that are held among Southern Baptists concerning this book. Different views of Revelation can be described in various ways; we have chosen to use the terms that probably are most familiar to Southern Baptists.

The three most common views of Revelation among Southern Baptists today are the "amillennial," the "dispensational premillennial," and the "historical premillennial" views. A fourth view, the "postmillennial" view, is less common among Southern Baptists today. For that reason, this view is not dealt with in this study. The "postmillennial" view holds that a thousand years of peace and righteousness on earth will be brought about through the spread of the gospel and will be followed by Christ's second coming, the resurrection, the judgment, and the eternal order.

In seeking to deal fairly with the three most common views of Revelation within the limited space available in this periodical, we will use a feature in the lessons that we call "Perspectives." The three millennial viewpoints described in "Perspectives" are drawn from and referenced to the written commentaries on Revelation by H. H. Hobbs ("amillennial"), H. A. Ironside ("dispensational premillennial"), and George E. Ladd ("historical premillennial"). We realize that some variation in interpretation exists among advocates within each of these views, but the three interpreters we have referenced are widely recognized among Southern Baptists. In some instances, we have referenced another advocate of the same millennial viewpoint whose comments on a particular

detail seemed clearer than those of the interpreter usually referenced. The above-mentioned books are included on page 10 of this periodical.

Biblical prophecy usually had both an immediate and a later application. Interpreters of Revelation generally agree that the book had an application to the time in which it was written, an ongoing application throughout history, and an application to the end of history.

The Greek word translated "Revelation" in Revelation 1:1 means an "unveiling" or "disclosure." This Greek word has been brought into the English language ("apocalyptic") to describe a type of biblical literature that discloses truth by means of symbolic language. God led some of the biblical writers to use "apocalyptic" language in communicating with His people concerning times of great crisis that they faced. The symbolic language revealed truth to God's people but concealed it from their enemies. The Old Testament books of Ezekiel and Daniel contain apocalyptic language, and Revelation also makes wide use of apocalyptic language. The message conveyed to God's people through the apocalyptic writings in the Bible can be summarized as the assurance that God will intervene in the conflict between good and evil, fulfilling His purpose in history, destroying evil, and bringing eternal victory to His people.

God's people today still need the same assurance. Let us pray that our study of the Book of Revelation may help us find our places in God's plan and serve Him faithfully, regardless of the consequences, with confidence in the ultimate fulfillment of His purpose in the world.



# OPENING VISIONS AND LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

REVELATION 1:1 to 5:14

# 1

UNIT

July 5

## John's Vision of Jesus Christ

**Background Passage:** Revelation 1:1-20

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 1:1,3,9-13,16-20

**Central Truth:** John's account of Jesus appearing to him on Patmos to commission him to write down the prophetic revelation challenges believers to identify and apply to their lives the message of Revelation.

### BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. Introduction: The Writer and His Purpose (1:1-3)
2. Introduction: Salutation and Doxology (1:4-8)
3. The Occasion of John's Commission (1:9-11)
4. The Appearance of the Son of Man (1:12-16)
5. The Command to Write the Message of Hope (1:17-20)

Please read the introductory article on page 14 of this periodical.

This book sets out to open the curtains of history to enable us to see what happens to humanity and how the human story ends. The central figure is Jesus Christ. The focus of the message is the victory of God the Almighty over all who seek to frustrate His purposes.

*Introduction: the writer and his purpose (1:1-3).*—John, the inspired writer, was given a message from Jesus Christ of things that must occur. The message was sent to John by an angel. The source of the message was God, and the content was described as “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus Christ” (v. 2). A promise of blessing was made to both readers and hearers of this prophecy.

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Book of Revelation	Current history written in code to confound enemies and encourage Asian Christians; message applies to all Christians throughout the ages	Immediate application to Asian Christians; applies to all Christians throughout the ages, but the visions also relate to a great future event	"Unveiling" of theme of Christ among churches in present dispensation, also as Judge and King in the dispensations to come
Meaning of "signified" (1:1)	Indicates use in Revelation of symbols, apocalyptic language	Indicates "sign language" to portray the invisible realities of the present and future of mankind in history	Indicates a book of symbols, every one of which is explained or alluded to somewhere in the Bible
Seven candlesticks (1:13)	Churches		Churches, plus end-time application
Seven stars (1:16,20)	Pastors	Symbolizes heavenly or supernatural character of the church (some believe refers to pastors)	Pastors or saints
Things which thou hast seen (1:19)	Cannot be assigned to specific sections of the book; all three phrases are reflected throughout the book. The writer wrote in a broad sweep.	Vision of glorified Christ (chap. 1)	
Things which are (1:19)		State of seven churches of Asia (chaps. 2-3)	Church age (chaps. 2-3)
Things which shall be (1:19)		Consumation of God's redemptive purpose and coming of kingdom of God (chaps. 4-22)	After church age: includes great tribulation, kingdom, and eternal state (chaps. 4-22)

*Introduction: salutation and doxology (1:4-8).*—John firmly anchored the book in history. He addressed the message to seven actual churches in the Roman province of Asia. He greeted them in the style that was the custom of the time. The greeting came from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is described as the Lord of all the ages, past, present, and future. Therefore, He is Lord of all the ages, past, present,

and future. Therefore, He is Lord of all that happens in human history. John identified Jesus as the faithful witness who conquered death. He affirmed that Jesus deserves our highest praises because he loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. John identified the Spirit in His sevenfold fullness. John affirmed the second coming of Christ and the impact of that event on the people of the world.

*The occasion of John's commission (1:9-11).*—John indicated that he was exiled on an island called Patmos because of his preaching the Word of God and telling about Jesus. On the Lord's Day he was worshipping through the Spirit's guidance when suddenly he heard a loud voice behind him that sounded like a trumpet blast. The voice instructed John to write down every thing that he heard and saw and send it to the seven churches in Asia.

*The appearance of the Son of man (1:12-16).*—When John turned to look at who was speaking he saw a vision of seven candlesticks of gold. (See Focal Passage Study for an explanation of the candlesticks.) Standing among the candlesticks was One who looked like the Son of man. With powerful symbolic language John described the exalted Christ. He was wearing a long robe circled with a golden band around His chest. His eyes like a flame of fire portrayed His all-knowing, all-searching presence. His words were powerful like a sharp two-edged sword.

*The Command to Write the Message of Hope (1:17-20).*—So overwhelming was the vision of Jesus that John fell to the ground unconscious. However, Jesus laid His hand on him and assured him that he had nothing to fear. Out of the setting of a discouraged, persecuted first-century church John was inspired to write the message of hope.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### INTRODUCTION: THE WRITER AND HIS PURPOSE (1:1,3)

**<sup>1</sup>The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:**

.....  
**<sup>3</sup>Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.**

**Verse 1.** John's introduction is brief but vitally important. He began the book with words that describe its theme: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." The central figure is Jesus Himself and the dominating theme

of the book is the victory of God the Almighty over all who seek to frustrate His purpose.

*The Revelation.*—The language style is different from most of the rest of the New Testament. It belongs to a special class of writings known as “apocalyptic,” or “revelation.” A “revelation” is an uncovering of what is hidden or the removal of a veil to show what is behind it. The unveiling was given by God to His Son in order that He in turn may show it to His servants, so that they may be prepared adequately for “things which must shortly come to pass.”

*Of Jesus Christ.*—These words are capable of being interpreted in two different ways. Is the book about Jesus or is He the Giver of the revelation? Most commentators agree that there is an element of both. God the Father is the source, and God the Son is the agent through whom this revelation is given to humanity. This was the pattern in the Gospels as Jesus declared that all He was and did was from the Father (John 3:35; 5:20; 7:16; 8:28). Jesus not only was the One who gave the revelation, He is also involved in those events and the process of redemption and judgment of which the revelation speaks.

*His servants.*—Does this refer to the prophets, such as John, or to all Christians? Since the revelation was to be sent to the seven churches, “servants” here seems to include all believers. The principles of truth that were meaningful to the first-century Christians are also important for us today.

*Things which must shortly come to pass.*—These words have troubled interpreters. Some have interpreted the phrase to mean “these events must soon begin”; others, “they must swiftly take place”; that is, once the events begin, the end will come quickly. The answer seems to be found in the way the prophets looked at the future. They blended the near and the distant. The prophets spoke not only of events in their day; they often related those events to the last great event at the end of history. In other words, the contemporary judgment of God was seen as a type of His future judgment. The same God who acted then will act in the same way in the future.

*He sent and signified.*—“He” refers back to Jesus Christ. God gave the revelation to Jesus, who gave it to His angel, who gave it to John. God the Father is the source of all revelation; God the Son was the agent through whom this revelation was imparted to persons through the further mediation of “his angel.”

The method of imparting this knowledge is stated in two words, “sent” and “signified.” The word “signified” means to convey truth by signs and symbols. Such an interpretation fits Revelation since it is largely written



in "signs." These signs were given to John who "bare record" (v. 2). This picture language is not unique to this book. It was used earlier in such books as Daniel in the Old Testament. The people of John's day would have been acquainted with this kind of symbolism and would have been able to understand John's message. A modern example would be the political drawings used in newspapers. Artists often employ bizarre and exaggerated features to convey their messages more forcefully and plainly. These drawings seek to relate a message regarding the situations of the day. Symbols of men and animals are often used to represent political parties and nations. The American Eagle, the British Lion, the Russian Bear, and the Chinese Dragon are modern examples of symbolic language. America's main political parties are represented by the figures of the donkey and the elephant.

An example of symbolic language in this book is seen in a description of the Holy Spirit as "the seven Spirits which are before his throne" (v. 14). The number seven is a symbol of fullness, therefore, a picture of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness. The crucial thing about the Book of Revelation is not its symbols but the message which they convey. The primary purpose of the writer was not to cover up his message but to make it increasingly powerful.

**Verse 3.** Some Bible students are reluctant to study this book because of its unusual symbols. However, God has promised a special blessing to all who study its message.

*Blessed is he that readeth . . . hear . . . keep.*—A blessing was promised to churches that read the Revelation aloud. That this is the meaning seems to be shown by the words, "those who hear." This refers to public reading and hearing. The early church continued the Jewish practice of reading Scripture in the congregation.

This reading was intended to challenge God's people to "keep," or obey, the words of the prophecy. There are many exhortations to faith, patience, obedience, prayer, and watchfulness in this book. This revelation of the end of history was not given to satisfy the curious, but to inspire holy living in accordance with the truth unveiled. It was given not merely to impart information about the future, but to help God's people in the present.

*The time is at hand.*—There is a sense of urgency in the prophecy. This phrase has the same emphasis on urgency as the statement in verse 1, "must shortly come to pass."

## THE OCCASION OF JOHN'S COMMISSION (1:9-11)

<sup>9</sup>I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and

in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, <sup>11</sup>Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

**Verse 9.** John described the occasion of the revelation and related the first vision, a vision of Jesus, exalted and glorified.

*John . . . your brother . . . in tribulation . . . the kingdom.*—As one of Jesus' twelve apostles, John was well known to the churches. John called himself a "brother" to the members of the churches of Asia. He related that he shared with them in "tribulation" and in the "kingdom" (v. 9). These are major concerns of the book: the tribulations which the people of God were to experience, and their participation in the kingdom. It is because these early Christians were experiencing the kingdom of God, His rule over their lives, that they could face the tribulations of that day.

Jesus had warned his followers that they would face tribulation (John 16:33). Paul also had spoken about tribulation (Acts 14:22). Some interpreters view the kingdom here to be strictly in the future; others as only a present experience. Still others see it as both. They stress that Christ is Lord of all believers now as He reigns in their hearts and lives. Still the kingdom of God is to have a future fulfillment in all its fullness.

*Patience of Jesus Christ.*—Some translate "in Jesus." This translation is similar to Paul's frequent expression, "in Christ," signifying the believer's spiritual union with the Lord. "Patience" means an active and strong endurance rather than a negative resignation. Regardless of the tribulation and evil which will befall the people of God, all of these hardships are experienced "in Jesus." John declared in one of his letters, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

*In the isle . . . called Patmos.*—Patmos was one of several islands southwest of the coast of Asia, in the Aegean Sea. It was a Roman prison island. John wrote that he had been exiled to this island because of his preaching.

**Verse 10.** John's use of the phrase "in the Spirit" seems to indicate that he was caught up in a spiritual trance.

*In the Spirit on the Lord's day.*—The first day of the week, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead, was of great importance to early Christians. Here is the first evidence that the day was particularly consecrated

to the Lord as "the Lord's day." Luke told of believers gathering on the first day of the week to "break bread" (Acts 20:7). Paul instructed believers to worship with offerings on the first day (1 Cor. 16:2).

*Heard behind me a great voice.*—The voice was described as sounding like a trumpet. A trumpet was used to sound the charge or to call attention of the people. It got John's attention.

**Verse 11.** John was commanded to write what he was about to see in a book. An ancient book consisted of a long strip of papyrus rolled up in a scroll.

*I am Alpha and Omega.*—The voice which John heard identified Himself as "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. Here these words indicate that Jesus is the Lord of all history.

*Seven churches.*—Why were these seven churches selected rather than any other seven? There were other churches in Asia. Colossae, near Laodicea, was one. Paul wrote one of his letters to this church. Perhaps these seven churches were selected because they were peculiarly representative of the main virtues and weaknesses of all churches everywhere. The number seven is a symbolic number of entirety or totality. Therefore, God sent this message to all the churches.

## THE APPEARANCE OF THE SON OF MAN (1:12-13,16)

<sup>12</sup>And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; <sup>13</sup>And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

.....  
<sup>16</sup>And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

**Verse 12.** Turning to see the source of the voice, John was granted the first vision in the Book of Revelation—that of the exalted Christ.

*Seven golden candlesticks.*—The candlesticks were identified in verse 20 as the seven churches. A candlestick, or lampstand, is one of the most powerful symbols of the church and its mission. The lampstand is to hold the light and give it out. The mission of the church is to give light in the world (Matt. 5:14-16).

**Verse 13.** John's description of Jesus here is one of the most forceful in all Scripture.

*In the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man.*—

“Son of man” was Jesus’ favorite title to designate His own person and mission. This title goes back to Daniel 7:13 where it is used to describe the Messiah. In the vision, Jesus was dressed in a long robe with a golden girdle. This was the garb of the high priest (Ex. 28:4). Therefore, Jesus was revealed here in His priestly function.

**Verse 16.** The assurance of Christ’s great strength would give courage to suffering Christians.

*In his right hand seven stars.*—“In his right hand” indicates favor, strength, and protection. Verse 20 relates the stars to the churches. Therefore, see comments on verse 20.

*Out of his mouth . . . a sharp two-edged sword.*—This phrase describes the power of the word of God spoken by Jesus (Heb. 4:12). He speaks, and it shall be done. In creation, God spoke, and it was done (Gen. 1:3).

*As the sun shineth in his strength.*—This is John’s description of the “glory” of the exalted Christ. This description is similar to that of Christ’s transfiguration during His earthly ministry (Matt. 17:1-2). Now this same Jesus was revealed again in power and great glory.

## THE COMMAND TO WRITE THE MESSAGE OF HOPE (1:17-20)

<sup>17</sup>And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: <sup>18</sup>I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. <sup>19</sup>Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; <sup>20</sup>The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

**Verse 17.** John’s reaction to the vision of Christ was similar to Isaiah’s response to a manifestation of God’s glory (Isa. 6:1,5). It is an awesome thing to encounter the living God.

*Right hand upon me.*—John was overcome with a consciousness of his unworthiness in the presence of the heavenly Christ, but he was reassured. The “right hand” of the Son of man was laid on him and he was told not to be afraid. Jesus is “the first and the last.” This means He is eternal, self-existent, all powerful.

**Verse 18.** Jesus not only has life in Himself, He is the source of life for others. He not only has control over life, but over hell, the realm of death itself.

*The keys of hell and of death.*—“Keys” in Jewish thought symbolized



authority (Matt. 16:19). Through His own death, Christ has gained the keys, the authority, over death and hell. Christ's victory over death meant a great deal to the early Christians. It was one of the favorite subjects of the first sermons (Acts 2:23-32).

The Greek word translated "hell" here (*hades*) generally refers to the immediate or present state of the dead (Acts 2:27,31). In the Revelation, "hell" (*hades*) is always linked with death and regarded as an enemy. Christ has conquered both hell and death.

**Verse 19.** John's commission to write a message of hope (v. 11) was now repeated.

*Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*—(See "Perspectives" for an overview of three interpretations of these phrases.) These words provide a summary of the entire book: "the things which thou hast seen"—the vision of Christ in chapter 1; "the things which are"—the letters to the churches, chapters 2—3; and "the things which shall be hereafter"—the vision from chapter 4 to the end.

**Verse 20.** John was given an explanation of two of the symbols used in verses 12-13,16.

*The mystery.*—The word "mystery" in the New Testament means something which God has made known which man could not otherwise have known. The seven "stars" and "candlesticks" had hidden meanings which needed explanation. The "stars" were identified as "the angels of the seven churches." Some interpreters see them as guardian angels, responsible for the welfare of each church. "Angel" literally means *messenger*. It is a term used in the Old Testament of both human and heavenly messengers. This has led some interpreters to understand the stars to be the pastors or leaders of the churches. Others believe that the stars are a symbol of the heavenly character of the churches. Their earthly conduct is a reflection of their heavenly relationship. Whether the stars represent the pastors, a guardian angel, or the heavenly character of the churches, the important emphasis is that they are "in his right hand" (v. 16). Jesus is in control, probing His church where necessary, providing and protecting it as needed.

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

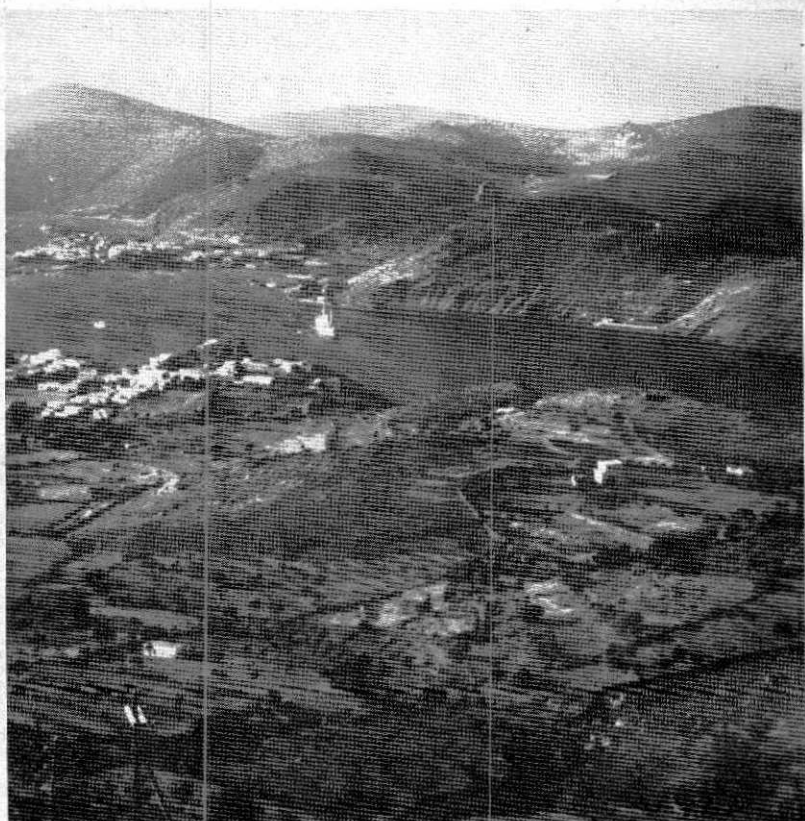
1. *God promises a special blessing to those who study and heed the message of Revelation.*—Many do not want to study the Book of Revelation because it seems so difficult to understand. God has promised a special blessing to all who will read, hear, and obey the truth of this book. Therefore, the truths are capable of being understood and obeyed. The

challenge is for us to understand the messages behind the symbols.

2. *A realization of all that Jesus is inspires us to greater faithfulness.*—In the face of the uncertainty, discouragement, and despair of life, John affirmed the certainty of the triumph of God in the reigning and returning Christ. Christ is revealed as the risen Lord who holds the keys of death and life, and as the sovereign Lord of the universe who holds the church in His right hand.

3. *God controls all history.*—Changing events of the times should not defeat the Christian. We may not know the future, but we trust in the One who not only knows it, but controls it!

4. *We are called to be Christ's witnesses to all the world.*—The candlestick is a powerful illustration of the mission of the church. We are challenged to bear the light of the gospel in an increasingly darkening world regardless of the cost.



The Island of Patmos, where John wrote Revelation.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to express the significance of Christ's appearance and message to John, and to list three views of interpreting Revelation; and to identify values they will receive from a study of Revelation

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Make a quarter's outline poster of Revelation (Kit item 1); (2) Make a map of the first-century Roman world (Kit item 3); (3) Make enough copies of the list (Kit item 4) called for in Step 7. (4) If you use *Biblical Illustrator* enlist (Kit item 2a) someone to read "Domitian" in the current issue and share highlights of the article with the class.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains the following helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 2a and 2b—"FOR NEXT WEEK" Assignment Slips; Item 3—Map: First-Century Roman World; Item 4—Values to be Gained from Studying Revelation.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 1:1,3,9-13,16-20

**1** To create interest in the Bible study: Ask: If someone who loved you supremely wrote you a letter in code, how much effort would you put forth to break the code? Explain that you have three questions which flow out of this one. Ask, but without waiting for response: Is there any doubt that Christ loves us supremely? Call for brief responses to a second question, Why do you feel Revelation is difficult to understand? Ask: Are you willing to spend three months in an earnest attempt to understand the message of Revelation? Lead a special prayer of dedication to such a purpose. Use the quarter's poster (Kit item 1) to show the lesson titles for the first three lessons.

### OR

Ask members how they feel about attempting a quarter's study of Revelation. After some responses are made, reaffirm the positive attitudes that are expressed. Ask what makes Revelation hard to understand. Ask how many hesitate to study Revelation because they do not understand the signs and symbols. Then ask members to react to the illustration of road signs used in their quarterlies in the discussion of Revelation 1:1. Encourage any who seem negative toward these studies to give their sincere help to the class in seeking to follow the road through Revelation.

**2** *To understand three views of interpreting Revelation:* Ask members to locate the "Perspectives" in their quarterlies. Introduce the headings of the three columns as representing different views of interpreting Revelation. Have members read aloud the statements about Revelation given in each view. Point out how all three views agree on some verses by pointing out columns that are common to more than one view. (See "Seven candlesticks," v. 13; "Things which thou hast seen," v. 19, as examples.) Challenge members to seek to understand differences among these views as the quarter's study progresses.

**3** *To explain the purpose of Christ's appearance to John:* Ask members to turn to Revelation 1:1 and underline three phrases: "revelation of Jesus Christ," "things which must shortly come to pass," "he sent and signified it." Use the following to explain each phrase: (1) the meaning of the word "revelation" and the role of Jesus Christ in this book' (2) the possible meanings of "shortly come to pass"; and (3) the meaning of "signified" as it relates to the symbols used throughout the book.

**4** *To appreciate the blessedness promised those who study Revelation:* Read aloud verse 3. Invite members to name the most important of the three words of human activity (read, hear, keep) and tell why they think it most important. Ask, What particular blessing do you think the readers received from obeying these instructions?

**5** *To see the eternal unchanging nature of Christ:* Ask members to scan the focal passage to find three verses which tell of the eternal nature of Christ. As they identify them, write the verse references on the board (vv. 11,17,18). Explain how each verse teaches the eternal, unchanging nature of Christ. Use "Focal Passage Study" and *Bible Book Study Commentary*.

Use the map (Kit item 3) to show Patmos in relation to the seven churches in Asia. Ask why John was there. If you made the assignment in the *Biblical Illustrator* call for a report. From the map point out the area to which Christ directed the book to be sent.

Use the information in the "Focal Passage Study" to explain the symbolism of these portions of John's vision: the seven candlesticks (v. 12), the garment and the girdle (v. 13), and the seven stars (v. 16).

**6** *To appreciate the power of God's inspired Word:* Ask members to read silently the description of Christ in verses 12-16 to find



which part suggests His Word is inspired and powerful ("out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword"). Ask how this description might convey the idea of an "inspired" and "powerful" Word. (It came out of His mouth; it was sharp.)

Use the information in the "Focal Passage Study" to explain the significance of Revelation 1:19. Refer members to the "Perspectives" for more information.

**7** *To identify values to be gained from studying Revelation:* Give each member a copy of the following (Kit item 4). Ask them to rank the items from 1 to 5 to show what they would like to gain from this study of Revelation. (See study question 5.)

- \_\_\_ A new sense of Christ's nearness during times of personal crisis
- \_\_\_ A deepened conviction of our ultimate victory with Christ
- \_\_\_ More confidence in Christ's ability to know and meet our needs
- \_\_\_ A clearer understanding of the meaning and power of this book
- \_\_\_ A commitment to more enthusiastic service to God through our church

Invite two or three to share how they ranked these statements. Close with prayer that the top priorities will be realized during the quarter.

*Bible Book Study Guide:* It is time for your literature order to go in for next quarter. The book to be studied this fall is Genesis (Part 1). The *Study Guide* is designed for class members to use as a supplement to *Bible Book Study for Adults*. If all members used the *Study Guide* it will enhance your study of the biblical passages. If you have not ordered copies of the *Guide* for next quarter, now is the time to do so.

**FOR NEXT WEEK:** If you use *Biblical Illustrator* enlist a member (Kit item 2b) to read "The Seven Churches in the Revelation" in the current issue and be prepared to summarize the article during the study next Sunday.

# Letters to the Seven Churches

**Background Passage:** Revelation 2:1 to 3:22

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 2:1-7; 3:14-16,19-22

**Central Truth:** The strengths and weaknesses of the Ephesian church and the lukewarmness of the Laodicean church challenge churches today to examine their focus and their relationships to Christ.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. To the Church in Ephesus (2:1-7)
2. To the Church in Smyrna (2:8-11)
3. To the Church in Pergamos (2:12-17)
4. To the Church in Thyatira (2:18-29)
5. To the Church in Sardis (3:1-6)
6. To the Church in Philadelphia (3:7-13)
7. To the Church in Laodicea (3:14-22)

*To the church in Ephesus (2:1-7).*—Jesus introduced Himself as the One who held the seven stars and walked in the midst of the seven candlesticks. He recounted a number of very positive points concerning the Ephesian believers. And yet, He pointed out that there was one thing missing. The members had left their first love.

*To the church in Smyrna (2:8-11).*—Jesus introduced Himself as the One who was dead, and came to life. He knew that the church was going through difficult times of tribulation and poverty. Christ challenged this church not to be afraid to suffer. He promised a crown of life to those who were faithful until death.

*To the church in Pergamos (2:12-17).*—Jesus introduced Himself as the One who has the sharp two-edged sword. Again, Jesus told the church that He knew several good things about them. They lived under difficult circumstances but they had not denied the faith. However, the church had allowed teachers who did not conform to the truth. It was told what to do to overcome this compromise: repent. Otherwise, Jesus would come and fight against their errors with His truth. Again a gracious promise accompanied the Lord's warning. Those who overcame would receive His provision and protection.

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Churches addressed (chaps. 2-3)	Specific historical situations, truths apply to churches throughout the ages; do not represent periods of church history		Specific historical situations and to all churches throughout the ages; also shows progress of churches' spiritual state until end of church age: (1) Ephesus—first-century church; (2) Smyrna—AD 100-310, church under persecution; (3) Pergamum—from Constantine to sixth century, church and state united; (4) Thyatira—seventh century when papacy established up to Reformation (idolatry); (5) Sardis—great state churches of Reformation through sixteenth or seventeenth centuries (declined in fundamental beliefs); (6) Philadelphia—revived churches of eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, spiritual advance; (7) Laodicea—increasingly apostate church from twentieth century to end-time. "Mystery" (1:20) indicates this interpretation.

*To the church in Thyatira (2:18-29).*—Jesus called Himself the Son of God, whose eyes were like a flame of fire, and whose feet were like fine brass. As in each letter, He told the church He knew about them. He commended the church for its strengths and growth. However, the church was allowing someone called "that woman Jezebel" to teach false doctrine to the church. Acts of immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols were special signs of this heresy. The Lord did not give up on the church. Some in the church had remained faithful. Jesus encouraged them to stand firm in that which they already had received and experienced.

*To the church in Sardis (3:1-6).*—Jesus introduced Himself as the One who had the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. He had little good to say about this church. Instead He chided its members: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Even though the church was "dead," Jesus offered it hope. He challenged the members to remember the message which they originally had heard and to hold it fast. If they did not, Christ would come, not in blessing, but in judgment. Jesus recognized the few who had remained faithful and promised them His blessings.

*To the church in Philadelphia (3:7-13).*—Jesus called Himself the One that was holy, true, and had the key of David, with the authority to open and close doors as he willed. Jesus reserved His greatest tribute for this church. He commended their faithfulness. As a demonstration of His faithfulness, He promised the church that those who had been deceivers would someday acknowledge that the living God was with this church. He promised that in the end He would exalt them, and He encouraged them to remain faithful because He would protect them.

*To the church in Laodicea (3:14-22).*—As Jesus addressed the last of the seven churches, He referred to Himself as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. The major complaint that Jesus had against this church was that it was neither warmly zealous nor coldly indifferent. It had been neutral. He revealed that this was a nauseating condition to Him. He told the members that they needed to get rid of their self-sufficient attitude. He challenged members of the church to repent and open their lives to Him.

## **FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY**

### **TO THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS (2:1-7)**

<sup>1</sup>Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; <sup>2</sup>I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: <sup>3</sup>And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. <sup>4</sup>Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. <sup>5</sup>Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. <sup>6</sup>But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.



Ephesus was one of the great cities of the ancient world. It was noted for its wealth, culture, commerce, politics, religion and corruptness. Ephesus was the home of all kinds of superstitious practices and was famous for its magical arts (Acts 19:19). It also was famous for its temple of Artemis (Diana), a Greek goddess (Acts 19:35), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

**Verse 1.** *The angel.*—The stars in Christ's right hand are said to be "angels of the seven churches" (1:20). (For a fuller discussion of the meaning of the seven stars, see the study of 1:20 in the previous lesson.) Whether the "angel" here refers to the church's pastor, a guardian angel, or to the heavenly character of the church itself, Christ's message here relates to the entire church, not just its leaders.

*He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand.*—This is one of the characteristics of Christ taken from the vision in 1:16. This special attribute indicates His absolute power and sovereign protection over the churches and their leaders as He moves among them.

*Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*—This description of Christ is related to the one given in 1:13. It declares His relation to the churches. He is present in His churches: the center of their unity and authority, the source of their power and life.

**Verse 2.** *I know thy works . . . labour . . . patience.*—The Lord expressed His thorough knowledge of His church. The word "works" is general and inclusive of all that follows. The word "labour" means toil. It has reference to the effort that produces hard work at the cost of pain. They were working in face of great difficulty. The word "patience" means steadfastness. It is the capacity to stay under the heavy burden.

*Them which are evil.*—Their good works were further described in the strong statement that they could not bear evil persons. This probably refers primarily to false teachers in the church. Because of the influence and importance of this church, teachers of every kind of doctrine were drawn to Ephesus. Many preachers and teachers appeared in the early church who claimed to speak for God. It was necessary to "try the spirits" (1 John 4:1) to determine whether such teachers really conveyed the Word of God.

Not only were there false prophets but also men who falsely claimed to be apostles. The word "apostle" was used to refer both to the original twelve, who retained a distinctive role (Rev. 21:14), and to others who were missionaries, such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:14). In addition, there were many false apostles operating out of selfish purposes rather than serving the church. The church in Ephesus was outstanding because of its ability to distinguish between true and false apostles and its refusal

to tolerate those who were false.

**Verse 3.** *Hast borne, and hast patience.*—Christ knew the trouble which the Ephesians had experienced on account of the evil and false teachers. Even in this trouble, they kept on enduring patiently. They were faithful in both their works and their doctrine.

**Verse 4.** *Left thy first love.*—With such praise from the Lord (vv. 2-3) one wonders if there could be anything wrong in such a church. But the piercing eye of the Lord discovered a glaring flaw; they had left their “first love.” Lovelessness kills a church! In spite of the strengths of the Ephesian church, it had failed to understand the very foundation of the Christian life: love. The members had departed from the love which had characterized their first experience as Christians. Without love, service is nothing. The emphasis here may be on the church’s first love for Christ Himself.

Was this a “love” for Christ, or for one another, or for humanity? It well may have included all three. Love of God and love to man were stressed by the Lord as essential and inseparable qualities (Matt. 22:37-39). The Ephesian converts had known such love in their early years (Eph. 1:15) but their struggle with false teachers and their hatred of heretical teaching had caused them to forsake love. In their struggle to maintain the standard of belief and practice, they had become self-opinionated and self-righteous and had developed a judgmental and hypercritical spirit. They had transformed a virtue into a vice.

Hatred of heresy can sometimes leave no room for those who differ in their beliefs. In the battle against evil, we must not lose the one quality, love, without which all others are worthless (1 Cor. 13). Doctrinal purity and loyalty can never be a substitute for love.

**Verse 5.** *Remember . . . repent . . . do the first works.*—To correct the problem, Christ spoke to the church with three commands: remember, repent, and do.

“Remember”—that is, “continue to remember”—that zeal for good works and truth can cancel out love. To forget to love is to fail to live. “Repent” here is a command for an instant change of mind, activity, and conduct. Repentance is a reversal of a position previously held. It involves a deliberate act of the will, to turn from and return to. It is a disposition of dependence on Christ.

The Ephesian Christians were warned to remember, repent, and repeat (do). Unless they repented, Christ would come to them and remove their lampstand from its place. The church would forfeit its right to be a lampstand and bear the light of life. A church can continue only for so long on a loveless course. “Except thou repent” signifies that they can

change. If they change they can be spared. If not, no hope!

**Verse 6. *Deeds of the Nicolaitans.***—Nothing is known about the Nicolaitans other than what is recorded in Revelation. The name combines Greek words for “victory” and “people.” Since the practices of the Balaamites (v. 14) and the followers of Jezebel (v. 20) were much the same, it appears the Nicolaitans also were similar in character. They claimed to be presenting an improved and modernized version of Christianity. This was not an enemy from outside openly seeking to destroy the faith; it was the enemy from within.

**Verse 7. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith.***—Christ speaks to the churches through the Spirit. The use of the plural “churches” in each letter is significant, indicating that no letter is addressed to a single church alone but is directed to all seven, and through the seven to all churches everywhere for all times. Each Christian in each church must hear for himself. Each one who has the capacity to understand the message is exhorted to respond and obey.

***To him that overcometh.***—The Christian life is an unrelenting warfare against the powers of evil. The warfare is spiritual and the victory is spiritual. The concept of overcoming is one of the outstanding features of the entire Book of Revelation. It means to be victorious over all circumstances. In this context it appears to mean living a life of service to God out of a heart of love. The Lord, whose voice is as a trumpet (1:10), calls on all the churches to give heed to what he says. It is not too late to change.

***Tree of life, . . . in the midst of the paradise of God.***—To the one who is living such a life of faith, the Lord promises fruit from the garden of God. The “tree of life” was the expression of eternal vitality and growth. It has reference to the Garden of Eden. It is a general description of what is available to every Christian, everlasting life.

The “paradise of God” recalls the first paradise in which man was placed and from which he was expelled because of his disobedience (Gen. 2:9). The word paradise was first used by the Persians to refer to beautiful royal parks. In the New Testament the word is used three times (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7) as an equivalent of heaven, the dwelling place of God.

## **TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA (3:14-16,19-22)**

<sup>14</sup>And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; <sup>15</sup>I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. <sup>16</sup>So then because thou art lukewarm, and

neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

.....  
<sup>19</sup>As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. <sup>20</sup>Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup>To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. <sup>22</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Laodicea was situated at the intersection of three well-traveled roads, making it one of the richest commercial centers in the world. It was noted for its banking. It manufactured cloth and carpets from its native, glossy, black wool. It was the location for a well-known medical school that compounded medicines for eyes and ears. It was also famous for its warm springs which provided water for bathing but was utterly unfit for drinking. This lukewarm water was used by the Lord as an example of spiritual complacency (vv. 15-16).

All of these factors were used by the Lord in His challenge to the church: "buy of me gold . . . that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed . . . and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see" (v. 18).

**Verse 14. Amen.**—The word "amen" is always used to affirm and guarantee a statement as true and trustworthy. It expresses unchanging faithfulness. It was a word with which Jesus introduced His most crucial teachings (John 5:24, for example). It was used here to identify Christ. His unchanging faithfulness ("amen") contrasts with the Laodiceans' unfaithfulness ("neither cold nor hot").

*Faithful and true witness.*—This is an amplification of the "amen." It also asserts the truthfulness, trustworthiness, and completeness of Christ's work as a witness in the strongest manner.

*The beginning of the creation of God.*—This statement indicates that Christ is the agent or instrument of God's creative work (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2).

**Verse 15. Would thou wert cold or hot.**—Christ was not only acquainted with what they did, but also with their inner motives and purposes. They had a profession but not warmhearted faithfulness. They were simply indifferent and complacent. This condition was nauseous to the Lord. There was no real love, only a pretence to it.

**Verse 16. Spue thee out of my mouth.**—The distaste and nausea produced by lukewarm water are used as an intensely strong figure to



express the extreme disgust which Christ feels toward insincerity and hypocrisy.

**Verse 19.** *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*—The Lord's attitude toward the church was not to punish but to correct. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6).

*Be zealous . . . and repent.*—In light of such a great love, the church was challenged to respond with zeal and repentance. The whole purpose for the severe rebuke was to cause repentance.

**Verse 20.** *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.*—Some interpreters see this as referring to the situation at the return of the Lord. Others see this as an individual invitation to Christians. Up to this point the letter has been addressed to the Laodicean church as a whole, but when Christ said "if any man . . ." He was appealing to the individual. In the present context, Christ was summoning the members of a lifeless, complacent church to respond to Him in repentance. Even though the church at Laodicea was in a sad, deplorable state, Christ stood at the door of the heart of each individual seeking admission to fellowship. This was a remarkably tender appeal to a church so far gone from its rightful state.

*If any man hear my voice, and open the door.*—What a powerful challenge, to us as individuals. The renewal of a whole church may come through the repentance of one. Throughout history the courage and faith of just one person has been used of God to alter the course of Christianity.

*Sup with Him, and he with me.*—A shared meal in the ancient Jewish world had great significance. It was an expression of affection, confidence, and intimacy. This invitation was to experience the most intimate possible fellowship with Christ.

**Verse 21.** *Will . . . grant to sit with me in my throne.*—Whereas verse 20 speaks of the Lord sharing His life with the believer now, this verse speaks of the believer sharing in the sovereignty of Christ in His future triumphant kingdom. As the Lord's conquest of sin and death through His death on the cross was rewarded by His Father, so Christ will honor those who are faithful now with participation in His kingly rule.

**Verse 22.** The vision of the seven churches is built around the concept of the coming of Christ and of the effect which that coming will have on the churches. Each church was being judged by the living Lord in anticipation of that climax, and all the correctives were to prepare the churches to fulfill their present mission and to ultimately reign with Him.

Warning against lukewarmness still stands. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *Christ examines us as His church to determine how effectively we are fulfilling His mission.*—He affirms us in our obedience and convicts us of our disobedience. He gives us opportunity to repent and be restored to usefulness. To those who hear and heed His words, Christ promises incredible blessings. If we refuse, we forfeit our privilege of useful service to Him.

2. *God's love in our lives enables us to do His work.*—Paul declared that without love all ministries are powerless (1 Cor. 13). Love is the foundation of all life's relationships. The capacity to love is produced in us as we allow the Holy Spirit to have control of us.

3. *We are to oppose sin, but love the sinner.*—Enthusiasm which hates wrong has to be on guard. It can easily be extended to the person as well as to his deeds. Christ opposed sin in every form, yet loved sinners enough to die for them.

4. *Complacency destroys our fellowship with Christ and our usefulness.*—The Lord Jesus desires to have fellowship with us moment by moment. He stands at our heart's door and seeks entrance into all of our life. Our indifference greatly affects our fellowship with Him and causes us to be ineffective and barren. Only as we open all our life to him can we enjoy Him in all His fullness.

5. *The Lord rebukes those whom He loves.*—No one likes to be corrected. Yet, if the Lord never convicted us, we would selfishly destroy ourselves and many around us. It is because He loves us that He disciplines us. It is through His discipline that we mature and grow into greater usefulness.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to identify some characteristics of the Ephesian and Laodicean churches and actions Christ commanded them to take, and to commit themselves to actions that will correct similar problems in their churches

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1) and the map (Kit item 3). (2) Make enough copies of the list (Kit item 5) called for in Step 4 for each member to have a copy. (3) If you use *Biblical Illustrator*, enlist (Kit item 2b) someone to read "The Seven Churches in the Revelation" in the current issue and report on it to the class.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains the following helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 2b and 2c—"FOR NEXT WEEK" Assignment Slips; Item 3—Map: First-Century Roman World; Item 5—Commendations and Condemnation.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 2:1-7; 3:14-16,19-22

**1** *To create interest in Bible study:* Ask members to write in the margin of their quarterlies at least three ways they feel the Holy Spirit speaks today. Ask each person to share one of the ways written. Keep going around the group until no more new ideas are offered. (If you need to help with ideas, suggest that He speaks through Scripture, sermons, inward impressions, the counsel of others, or such like.) Suggest that today you want the class to let the Spirit speak to them through the successes and failures of others. Invite members to open their Bibles to Revelation, chapters 2—3. Call attention to these seven verses: 2:7a, 11a, 17a, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 and ask what these seven verses have in common. Suggest that the group pray that the Spirit will speak to your church through what was said to two churches in Asia—Ephesus and Laodicea.

**2** *To identify characteristics of the Ephesians and Laodicean churches:* Briefly draw attention to the part of the outline covered in the background passage for this lesson. Point out the session title on the quarter poster (Kit item 1). Locate the cities of Ephesus and Laodicea on the map (Kit item 3). Prepare a concise, one-minute descriptive summary of each city, using the "Focal Passage Study" material. If you made the assignment in *Biblical Illustrator* call for a report on these

two cities at this time.

Ask half of the members to represent the Ephesian church and the other half the Laodicean church. (If you do not want to divide into groups, you can do this activity with the whole class although it will take more time.) Have each group select a reader who will read aloud the letter to that church. Ask the others to identify characteristics of each church, both good and bad. Have the readers list all of the characteristics of the church as the group suggests them. Allow two or three minutes for the lists to be compiled. While the groups work, draw the following poster on the chalkboard.

Ephesus	Laodicea
Good	Good
Bad	Bad

When the groups have finished, ask them to share their lists. Write the characteristics in the appropriate place on the poster. Be sure the positive characteristics of patience, labor, and faithfulness are mentioned for Ephesus. For Laodicea, be sure the negative characteristic of indifference (lukewarmness) is listed. Describe how these four characteristics apply to these two churches.

**3** *To identify actions the Ephesian and Laodicean churches were commanded to take:* Now ask the same groups to scan their letter again to discover every action Christ commanded the church to take. Ask the readers to list those actions. For each action named, ask the groups to suggest what situation in the church demanded the action and what the result would likely have been if the action were taken. (You might give as an example: the Laodicean church was told to anoint its eyes. The situation might have been blindness to spiritual truth or to the ministries they were to be performing. The result could have been a church that came to delight in studying the Scriptures and finding God's truth or in awaking to areas of human need which they could meet.) Give the groups about four to five minutes to work, then call for the report. Having erased the material written earlier on the board, now list the actions identified for each church as they are mentioned. Be sure that for Ephesus the ideas of "remember," "repent," and "do" are listed. For Laodicea be sure the idea of "repent," "hear," and "open" are named. Use the "Focal Passage Study" material to explain the consequences if these actions were not taken. (For Ephesus, the removal of its candlestick and for Laodicea, the spewing out of Christ's mouth)



**4** *To identify why Christ commended the Ephesian church and condemned the Laodicean church:* Give each member a sheet of paper with two columns similar to those used on the board. Head one column "Commendation for the Ephesians" and the other "Condemnation for the Laodiceans" (Kit item 5). From the group work they have done, ask members to list as many reasons as possible why Christ commended the Ephesians and condemned the Laodiceans. Give them about three minutes to make their lists. Ask two or three to read aloud their lists. Ask members to add ideas shared by others to their own lists. Point out that Christ's condemnation of the Laodiceans should encourage us to a deeper commitment to Christ. If your church uses MasterLife, suggest members consider participating in it.

**5** *To identify any similar problems in their own church:* Ask members to circle one item on the list, either a commendation or condemnation, which points to a similar need in their own church. Let members share their circled item. Be careful not to let this become too negative.

**6** *To encourage commitment to actions that correct church problems:* Direct attention to the board again to see actions Christ commanded the Ephesian and Laodicean churches to take. Ask members to pick an action which would most nearly correct the problem or need they have circled. Ask members to mention the action chosen. Ask members to turn their "Commendations and Condemnations" list over and write two things they need to do to correct the problem they have identified. Encourage members to be a part of the answer and not a part of the problem. Have a time of prayer for the class that they will allow God to use them to accomplish His will in their lives and their church. **FOR NEXT WEEK:** If you use *Biblical Illustrator*, enlist (Kit item 2c) a member to read "Precious Stones in Revelation" in the current issue and report next Sunday, July 19.

July 19

# The Vision of God's Throne

**Background Passage:** Revelation 4:1 to 5:14

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 4:1-3,9 to 5:5,9-10

**Central Truth:** The picture of God as Creator and Sustainer and of Jesus as Redeemer worthy to open the book challenges people to apply to their own lives the reality of God's control of the world's destiny.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. God On His Throne (4:1-6a)
2. Four Living Creatures (4:6b-8)
3. Unceasing Praise by Creatures and Elders (4:9-11)
4. A Search for One to Break the Seals (5:1-4)
5. The Lamb Worthy to Break the Seals (5:5-7)
6. Heavenly Praise for the Worthy Lamb (5:8-12)
7. God and the Lamb Praised Together (5:13-14)

John was mysteriously transported into heaven itself. He saw in his vision a doorway. As John ascended to the heavenly temple, a voice told him the purpose of his being called. He was to learn "things which must be hereafter."

*God on His throne (4:1-6a).*—Immediately on hearing the command to "come up" into heaven, John was dazzled by the splendor surrounding him. He saw God on His throne and described Him in terms of precious stones. All around the throne of God, John saw twenty-four thrones, occupied by twenty-four elders. The elders were dressed in white garments and wore golden crowns. Seven lamps before the throne represented the sevenfold fullness of the Holy Spirit.

*Four living creatures (4:6b-8).*—John saw nearer the throne of God four living creatures. The four living creatures resembled four earthly creatures: the lion, the calf (or ox), man, and the eagle.

*Unceasing praise by creatures and elders (4:9-11).*—As John's eyes beheld the splendor around him, his ears heard the praise of God from the four living creatures. The twenty-four elders also fell on their faces before God and praised Him as Creator of all things.

*A search for One to break the seals (5:1-4).*—After hearing the praise of the elders, John noticed that the One seated on the throne had an unopened book in His hand, one sealed with seven seals. A "strong

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
"After this" (4:1)	Indicates after contents of chapters 1-3; chapter 4 represents God's sovereignty; chapter 5 represents Christ's redemptive work; together they present an overall setting for chapters 4-22.	Indicates that "things which shall be" begins with picture of God ruling universe. No basis for interpreting 4:1 to refer to rapture. "After this" refers to the coming of God's kingdom with end-time events.	"After this" means after the church age, therefore after the rapture of the church; catching of John into heaven symbolizes rapture of the church.
Twenty-four elders (4:4,10; 5:8,14)	Twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles; together symbolize all the redeemed	Company of angels who help execute God's rule (others believe elders represent twenty-four priestly and Levitical orders)	The rewarded church; their being crowned in heaven proves church won't go through great tribulation; also represents twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles
Sealed book (5:1-9)	Scroll of history; shows God carrying out His redemptive purpose within history	Contains prophecy of end events of chapters 7-22	Title deed to the world
Song, "Worthy is the Lamb," 5:4,9-10)	All three views believe song indicates that Christ won the victory over sin by His death and resurrection; differences are only in application to first and second comings of Christ.		

angel" asked whether someone was able to break the seals and reveal the contents of the book. No one "in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth" was qualified to open the book. John was upset and began to weep. It appeared the book would remain closed forever.

*The Lamb worthy to break the seals (5:5-7).*—One of the elders told John to stop crying. There was someone who was qualified to break the seals and open the book. It was "the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David" (that is, Jesus). As John turned to look at the Lion, there was no Lion but rather a Lamb standing in the middle of the throne. It was evident that the Lamb had been slain, but He was alive and standing. John was told that something had happened to the slain Lamb to enable Him to stand. He was told that He had full power ("seven horns") and

full knowledge ("seven eyes"). John watched as the Lamb approached the throne of God and took the sealed book from His right hand.

*Heavenly praise for the worthy Lamb (5:8-12).*—As the Lamb took the book, the living creatures and the elders burst into a song of praise directed to the Lamb. John was told that the reason the Lamb was worthy to open the book was that the death of the Lamb had purchased for God persons from "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Many angels near the living creatures and the elders also praised the worthiness of the Lamb.

*God and the Lamb praised together (5:13-14).*—The whole created order in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea joined the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in praising God and the Lamb.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### GOD ON HIS THRONE (4:1-3)

<sup>1</sup>After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. <sup>2</sup>And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. <sup>3</sup>And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

After the first vision of the glorified, risen Christ caring for and protecting His churches (chapters 2—3), a revelation was given of the greatness of God. As the Lord examined His churches to determine their effectiveness at being His candlesticks in a dark world, believers were reminded of the eternal truth that God is on His throne and ruling in His universe (chapter 4).

**Verse 1.** *After this I looked.*—This phrase generally introduces a new vision in the Revelation (7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1). It points back to the vision of Christ that John saw in the opening vision (1:12), and to the letters to the churches. Now another vision was reported. (See "Perspectives" for differing views.)

*A door was opened in heaven.*—John saw in heaven a door standing open. This was a door of revelation. John already had declared that He was "in the Spirit" (1:10). Therefore, the similar description in 4:2 ("I was in the spirit") apparently means that he was to receive greater insight into spiritual things.

In his visions throughout the book, John saw scenes on earth and in



heaven. What is happening on earth is vitally connected and related to what is happening in heaven. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

*The first voice.*—These words apparently refer to the voice of the glorified Christ which was the *first* voice heard in 1:10. Both there and here it is likened to the sound of a trumpet. A trumpet was used to sound an alarm or a charge, or to call attention to something important.

*Come up hither.*—Some interpreters find in this verse the rapture of the church (see "Perspectives"). This view sees the invitation to John as the symbol of the rapture of the church. According to this view, the great tribulation, during the end time when some of God's people are persecuted by the Antichrist, has nothing to do with the church but with the Jewish people of the last days. Support of this position is believed to be in the fact that the word "church" occurs numerous times in the first three chapters but not once again until 22:16.

Other interpreters do not relate 4:1 to the rapture of the church; they believe the language refers only to John's reception of the revelation of the book. John had an experience previously (1:10) in which he was "in the Spirit" and heard the voice "as of a trumpet." These interpreters see both of these incidents as describing a revelation to John. John was invited to see things from God's point of view.

**Verse 2.** *A throne was set in heaven.*—John was very interested in thrones throughout this book, especially the throne of God which is mentioned in almost every chapter. He used the word more times than any other writer in righteousness, entire New Testament. We are about to view God's work, and God's work includes the fact that He reigns. This vision is a challenge to believe in God's absolute control and His almighty power.

**Verse 3.** *He that sat.*—The majesty of what John beheld was so great and overwhelming that he could describe it only in symbolic terms.

*Like a jasper and a sardine stone . . . emerald.*—These three stones were the most costly and precious things ancient people could conceive. The jasper of the Bible was a translucent stone of many colors, light in nature, probably the modern diamond. John later wrote that the jasper was as "clear as crystal" (21:11). The more pure and brilliant, the more valuable. It is used to symbolize the holiness, righteousness, and glory of God coming into visibility. The sardine was various shades of red. These stones may have represented God's glory, righteousness, and holiness. At any rate, they symbolized spiritual facts about God which are beyond description or explanation.

*A rainbow . . . like an emerald.*—The rainbow around the throne, like

an emerald, was possibly an emblem of God's covenant which He established with Noah (Gen. 9:12-16), and a pledge of God's mercy and faithfulness to His promises. The emerald was a precious stone of a light green color. God's righteousness and mercy are never separated. The purpose of this vision is to fill us with awe at the radiant glory of the mystery of God's all-powerful majesty.

Some interpreters believe that the One described on the throne here is Christ, viewed as God's agent in creation (vv. 8-11; compare John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2).

#### **UNCEASING PRAISE BY CREATURES AND ELDERS (4:9-11)**

<sup>9</sup>And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup>The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup>Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

**Verse 9. *Those beasts.***—This refers to the four beasts, or living creatures, of verses 6-8. These creatures, along with the twenty-four elders, gave glory and honor and thanks to God. Some interpreters believe the four creatures represent God's qualities: the resemblance to a lion, God's majesty; the resemblance to an ox (or calf), God's strength in serving human needs; the resemblance to a man, God's intelligent purpose; the resemblance to an eagle, God's ability to see all human affairs and bring righteous judgment.

These four creatures were similar to the seraphim of Isaiah 6:2-3 and the cherubim in Ezekiel 10:14. Some interpreters feel that these creatures represent kinds of life in the created order (rather than God's qualities, as others believe). These interpreters view the resemblance to a lion as representing the undomesticated animals; the resemblance to an ox, domesticated animals; the resemblance to a man, human life; and the resemblance to an eagle, flying creatures. This view sees here a portrayal of praise to God by all of His created order.

**Verse 10. *Twenty-four elders.***—(See "Perspectives" to identify each view.) The twenty-four elders praise God for the glory of His created world. Who are these elders? One interpretation sees them as all the people of God in heaven in anticipation of eternity. The number twenty-four is said to represent the twelve Old Testament patriarchs and the twelve New Testament apostles—the people of God of both the Old and

New Testaments. Another view is that we have a representation of the church which was raptured with John's response to the call in 4:1, "Come up hither." The church is seen in the white robes of Christ's righteousness (v. 4). Still another view understands the twenty-four elders as a body of angels who help execute the divine rule in the universe. White clothing was the garb of angels (John 20:12). Whether the elders here represent God's people or angels, they express praise for God as the Creator of all things (v. 11). They acknowledge God as Supreme Ruler by casting their crowns before His throne (v. 10).

**Verse 11.** *Thou art worthy, O Lord.*—This expression is similar to those used in the Psalms relating to songs sung on festal occasions and celebrating blessings from God (Ps. 18:3; 48:1).

*To receive glory and honour and power.*—John saw all creation and the elders (vv. 9-10) join in a common hymn ascribing to God all thanksgiving, glory, and honor.

#### **A SEARCH FOR ONE TO BREAK THE SEALS (5:1-4)**

<sup>1</sup>And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup>And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? <sup>3</sup>And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. <sup>4</sup>And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

The theme of chapter 4 has been that of the all-powerful Creator, reigning majestically over all His creation. Now in chapter 5 the focus of John's eyes changes, and with dramatic force he describes his vision of the Redeemer in whom lies every hope of man's salvation, every hope of a future kingdom.

**Verse 1.** *In the right hand . . . a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.*—The right hand was the strong hand, the hand of power. In God's hand was a book. It is significant that the scroll rested "in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne" (v. 1). The whole story of human history, past, present and future, rests in the hand of God. However strong evil becomes, God is stronger.

The most common form of ancient books was a scroll. This scroll was sealed along the outside edge with seven seals of wax. The fact that the book was sealed with seven seals is important. Seven is the number of completeness. The scroll was completely sealed and its contents hidden from every human eye. Therefore, the contents of the book would not

be revealed until all seven seals were broken.

Some interpret the scroll as the record of God's activity in carrying out His redemptive purpose in history. Other interpreters feel that the scroll contained the prophecy of events of the end-time. Still other interpreters believe the scroll to represent the title-deed to the world.

The scroll was "written within and on the backside." This represents the fullness and completeness of the contents. History will not end until the purposes of God have come to their full conclusion.

**Verse 2.** *A strong angel proclaiming . . . Who is worthy to open the book . . . ?*—A strong angel with a loud voice asked whether there was one who could open the scroll. The tone of this question indicates that no quick answer was expected.

**Verses 3-4.** As John considered this dilemma, he could see no hope. No one in all creation could open the scroll and disclose its contents. God's ways can never be known to us except by His revelation. John wept because he could see no way by which the seals could be broken and God's will and purpose unfolded.

### **THE LAMB WORTHY TO BREAK THE SEALS (5:5)**

<sup>5</sup>And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

**Verse 5.** *One of the elders saith unto me, Weep not.*—One of the twenty-four elders (4:4,10) spoke a word of encouragement to John.

*The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals.*—The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, is worthy to open the seals because of His victory over sin, death, and the grave. In Christ, God has triumphed over all principalities and powers. The slain Lamb (v. 6) has become a powerful Lion worthy to break the seals.

The description of the one who could open the book combined several Old Testament descriptions that had messianic significance: Genesis 49:9; Isaiah 11:1,10; 53:2,7.

### **HEAVENLY PRAISE FOR THE WORTHY LAMB (5:9-10)**

<sup>9</sup>And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; <sup>10</sup>And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth.



**Verse 9. *A new song.***—The word “new” occurs several times in the Book of Revelation. It is applied to the new name (2:17; 3:12), to the new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2), to the new heaven and the new earth (21:1), and finally there is the resounding declaration that God makes all things new (21:5). The term signifies “fresh” as against “recent.” The Lamb’s saving work on the cross has created a new situation for redeemed sinners and that produces a new outburst of praise. The theme of the song, “Thou art worthy,” is the same as in 4:11. John made a powerful point that in heaven God is worshiped unceasingly as Creator and Redeemer.

***Wast slain.***—As the passover lambs were slain for Israel’s release from sin, and thereby made possible the nation’s deliverance from Egyptian slavery, so the death of the Lamb of God, coupled with His resurrection, has brought to humanity the possibility of deliverance from sin’s slavery. “Thou wast slain” points to the once-for-all crucifixion of Christ on the cross.

***Hast redeemed us.***—Christ, by the shedding of His blood on the cross, has brought into existence a new redeemed humanity. The verb redeem signifies purchase from slavery. It indicates ownership. Sinners are purchased so that they may belong to God. Paul wrote, “Ye are not your own . . . ye are bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

***Out of every kind’ed, and tongue, and people, and nation.***—The use of four areas, four being the number of the earth, signifies the universal scope of God’s love and redemption. “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16).

**Verse 10. *Hast made us unto our God kings and priests.***—This was one of the main keynotes of the first chapter (1:6). Deliverance from sin is but part of the plan of God. The redeemed become a kingdom of priests to our God.

The idea of priesthood means full and immediate access into the presence of God for the purpose of praise and worship, and the idea of a kingdom means that the redeemed will not merely be God’s people over whom He reigns; they will actually be granted the privilege of sharing His reign. Jesus promised that the meek would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5), and Paul’s message included the promise that the saints would one day reign (2 Tim. 2:12).

***We shall reign on the earth.***—The Kingdom of God is both a present reality as Christ rules in the hearts of His people, and it has a future fulfillment. The coming of the future Kingdom is an essential part of the completed redemptive purpose of God.

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *God is in total control of all His creation.*—An awareness of God as Creator in control of time and eternity will challenge us to a greater faithfulness in fulfilling His purpose in our life. God desires that we look at life from His viewpoint, not merely from the human perspective.

2. *God's power is available to His people to do His work.*—Like the first disciples, we can become confused and discouraged at the enormity of the task God has given us. Only as we understand that His power and authority are available to us will we be encouraged to overcome all obstacles in doing His will.

3. *True strength often lies in our seeming weakness.*—As the submissive Lamb turned out to be the conquering Lion, so we too, if we humble ourselves before the Lord, can see our weakness replaced with His eternal strength and victory.

4. *God delights for His people to worship and praise Him as Creator and Redeemer.*—If all the creatures of creation, if all the angels of heaven, praise and worship God for His redeeming love, surely those of us who have been saved by His shed blood can do no less.



Ephesus, where one of the churches in Revelation was located.

Illustrator Photo/David Rogers

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to explain the meanings of the heavenly scene in Revelation 4—5, and to determine how they can function as kings and priests by participating in Sunday School Bold Reach

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Keep the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1) displayed. (2) Assign the report to three members as called for in Step 3. (3) Enlist two members to read the Scripture called for in Step 4. (4) Make a poster (Kit item 6) of the chart called for in Step 4. (5) If you use *Biblical Illustrator*, enlist (Kit item 2c) a member to read "Precious Stones in Revelation" in the current issue and report on it during the class session.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains the following helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 2c and 2d "FOR NEXT WEEK" Assignment Slips; Item 6—Chart: The Worthiness of God.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 4:1-3,9 to 5:5,9-10

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Write the title of the gospel song, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," on the board. As an alternative, you might play a recording of the song for about a minute at the beginning of the lesson study. In either case, raise the questions: To what extent is this claim true? Does God have everything in His hands? What, if anything, has ever caused you to wonder if God does have the whole world in His hands? Invite members to turn with you in their Bibles to Revelation 4 and to study a passage that speaks directly to this issue.

**2** *To help members understand John's invitation to the heavenly scene:* Refer members to the "Perspectives" to see variations in the force of the words, "After this" (4:1). Use the "Focal Passage Study" material to explain the variations. Then ask a member to read the words John heard from the trumpet-like voice (4:1b). Prepare a brief discussion as to how the different views interpret 4:1. For help, see the "Perspectives."

**3** *To help members see the significance of John's description of God on His throne:* Ask members to scan the focal verses to find the one verse which describes the appearance of God on His throne.

(4:3). By previous assignment have three members prepared to describe the appearance of the three precious stones used in this verse, along with suggestions as to what they might symbolize about God. Make available to them the "Focal Passage Study" material in this quarterly. If you made the assignment in the *Biblical Illustrator* (Kit item 2c) call for this person to share information about the precious stones in Revelation.

As the reports are given, write on the board the various spiritual facts about God which are suggested. (Such as His majesty, power, holiness) Ask members to look at the list, then volunteer responses to a question like, If you were enduring severe persecution or pressure for being a Christian, which attribute of God would you find especially comforting and strengthening, and why?

**4** *To help members appreciate the praise given to God:* Enlist two members to read 4:9-11. Ask one to read verse 9, the second to read verse 10, and both in unison to read verse 11. Point out the two groups mentioned here who worship God (four beasts and twenty-four elders). Use the "Focal Passage Study" material to prepare a brief explanation of the four beasts. The *Bible Book Study Commentary* will also provide help. Refer members to the "Perspectives" to see the varied interpretations of the twenty-four elders.

Display the following chart (Kit item 6):

The Worthiness of God		
<i>Worshiping Group</i>	<i>Truth About God</i>	<i>Worshiping Group's Response to God</i>
God		
Beasts (v. 9)	Exalted position Eternal nature	Glory, honor, thanks
Elders (vv. 10-11)	Exalted position Eternal nature Creative power	Glory, honor, power

Call attention to what the beasts and the elders said about God. Ask members to find the phrases which support each truth about God, then to decide which truth is the basis for the worship. (Creative power, v. 11) Do the same concerning the threefold response of each group to God.

**5** *To help members explore the meaning of the sealed book:* Use a series of questions to provoke thought and response about the sealed book (5:1): (1) What was the significance of the book's posi-



tion? (2) What was the significance of seven seals? (3) What was the significance of the writing being within and on the backside? (4) What are some interpretations of the contents of the book? (See the "Perspectives.") (5) How do you account for John's reaction in 5:2-4? Prepare answers to the questions by using the "Focal Passage Study."

**6** *To help members see the worthiness of Christ to break the seals:* Ask a member to read aloud 5:5. Call for a volunteer to suggest what might have been meant by "prevailed." Point members to 5:9-10 to find ways Christ prevailed. Write the numbers 1 through 3 on the board. Ask members to identify from these two verses at least three accomplishments of Christ which made Him worthy to open the book. (1. He was slain; 2. He provided redemption for all persons; 3. He made the redeemed to be kings and priests.)

**7** *To help members determine how they can serve God as kings and priests:* On a sheet of paper or the chalkboard, write the words "Kings" and "Priests," as headings of two columns. Ask members to suggest ideas which these words convey concerning Christians. (Possible answers: Kings—dignity, power, leadership; Priests—representatives of God, worshipers, intercessors) Ask, What kinds of spiritual service are suggested by these truths? (Prayer for others, ministry, and witness to others, for example)

If your Sunday School is engaged in Sunday School Bold Reach activities during the quarter, encourage members to participate enthusiastically as "kings and priests" unto God. Help members be specific in some service to God. Ask them to turn to the title page of next week's lesson and write one activity they will seek to accomplish during the week in service to God. In order to make it even more definite, allow members to volunteer to tell what they have written. Then conclude with prayer asking specifically for each one to be enabled to carry out the activity.

**FOR NEXT WEEK:** If you use *Biblical Illustrator* enlist (Kit item 2d) someone to read "Horses in the Ancient World" in the current issue and serve as a resource person next Sunday.

*Bible Book Study Guide:* If you use the *Guide* remind members to take the posttest over Revelation 1:1 to 5:14 and the pretest over 6:1 to 7:17.

# 2

## UNIT

# OPENING SEVEN SEALS, BLOWING SEVEN TRUMPETS

REVELATION 6:1 to 11:19

July 26

## Seals of Judgment and Assurance for the Saved

**Background Passage:** Revelation 6:1 to 7:17

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 6:2-5,8-9; 7:2-4,9,14

**Central Truth:** John's vision of God's judgment, the sealing of the 144,000, and a great multitude praising God provides believers with the assurance they need to be faithful in spreading the gospel regardless of difficulty.

### BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. First Seal Opened: A White Horse (6:1-2)
2. Second Seal Opened: A Red Horse (6:3-4)
3. Third Seal Opened: A Black Horse (6:5-6)
4. Fourth Seal Opened: A Pale Horse (6:7-8)
5. Fifth Seal Opened: Cries of Faithful Martyrs (6:9-11)
6. Sixth Seal Opened: Shaking of Heaven and Earth (6:12-17)
7. Interlude: Sealing of 144,000 Servants (7:1-8)
8. Interlude: The Great Multitude (7:9-12)
9. Interlude: The Future of Those in White Robes (7:13-17)

After John had witnessed God the Almighty seated on the throne of heaven and Jesus as the Lion/Lamb standing in the midst of the throne, he saw Jesus take the seven-sealed scroll out of the right hand of the Father and begin to break open the seals.

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Time of seals 1-6 (chap. 6)	Drama; occur throughout history	General trends leading up to the end	Judgments of the first half of the seven-year tribulation
Seal 1 (6:1-2)	Earthly conqueror	Proclamation of gospel; others believe is earthly conqueror	Man's last effort to bring order to earth while rejecting Christ
Seals 2-4 (6:3-8)	Also with seal 1, suffering that must be endured throughout history	Constant problems of war, scarcity, and death	Sequence of disasters brought about by evil rule
Seal 5 (6:9-11)	Assurance for faithful (all ages) that God will judge evil		Jewish martyrs of tribulation period
Seal 6 (6:12-17)	End of time; God's final judgment	Real cosmic catastrophe at end of age	Symbolic description of breakup of society as a result of evil
144,000 (7:4-8)	Redeemed on earth who will be protected against God's wrath	Church on threshold of great tribulation	Jewish converts of tribulation period who witness to Gentiles (same as 14:1)
Great Multitude (7:9-10)	Uncountable multitude in heaven praising God for their salvation	Church, having gone through great tribulation, seen in heaven	Gentiles redeemed during tribulation period through witness of 144,000
Great tribulation (first reference in 7:14)	Persecution faced by Asian Christians of John's time; symbolic of tribulation that occurs throughout history	Period at end-time of unexplained trouble, before Christ's return; church will go through it; begins with seventh seal (18:1) which includes trumpets 1-6 (8:2 to 14:20)	Period at end-time of unexplained trouble referred to in 7:14 and described in chapters 11-18; lasts three-and-one-half years, the latter half of seven-year period between rapture and millennium

*First seal opened: a white horse (6:1-2).*—As the Lamb opened the first seal, John heard one of the four beasts saying come and look. He saw a white horse and a rider who had a bow. The rider wore a crown and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

*Second seal opened: a red horse (6:3-4).*—As the second seal was opened, John heard the second beast saying come and watch. He saw another horse that was red. The rider of the second horse had a great sword and was given power to take peace from the earth which caused

people to war against one another.

*Third seal opened: a black horse (6:5-6).*—When the Lamb opened the third seal, the third beast said to come and see. This time he saw a black horse with a rider who had a pair of scales in his hand. A voice in the midst of the four beasts called out the cost of wheat and barley. The rider was told not to hurt the oil and the wine.

*Fourth seal opened: a pale horse (6:7-8).*—As the Lamb opened the fourth seal, the fourth beast issued the call to come and look. John saw a pale horse and a rider whose name was Death. He saw Hell following. The power to kill a fourth part of the earth was given to the rider. The instruments of death were the sword, hunger, and wild beasts.

*Fifth seal opened: cries of faithful martyrs (6:9-11).*—When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, John saw martyrs under the altar of heaven. They had been slain because they were living testimonies of the Word of God. John heard the martyrs asking the Lord how long it would be before He would judge the earth. The martyrs were given white robes and told that they should rest until some of their brethren would also become martyrs. Then God's time for judgment would be fulfilled.

*Sixth seal opened: shaking of heaven and earth (6:12-17).*—When the Lamb opened the sixth seal, John saw the upheaval of the natural order by means of great calamities in nature. He saw the people of the earth, from all levels of life, trying to hide themselves from the face of God sitting on His throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

*Interlude: sealing of 144,000 servants (7:1-8).*—It would seem logical that the opening of the seventh seal would follow next. Instead, John was shown a vision of four angels standing on the four corners of the earth holding the four winds of the earth in their control. Still another angel came from the east with the seal of God. With a strong voice this angel instructed the four angels not to hurt the earth, the sea, or the trees until the servants of God had received the seal of God. The number which were sealed was 144,000.

*Interlude: the great multitude (7:9-12).*—After the servants of God had been sealed, John was shown a vision of a great multitude which could not be numbered. The multitude was composed of all the different kinds of people on the earth. John saw them standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands, praising God. All the angels joined the elders and the four beasts in worshipping God.

*Interlude: the future of those in white robes (7:13-17).*—One of the elders asked John about the great multitude. Who were they? Where did they come from? John answered the elder with deep respect, realizing



that the elder knew the answer to his own questions. The elder proceeded to tell John that the great multitude had come out of great tribulation and had washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. They now enjoyed the eternal protection and provision of God and the Lamb.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### FIRST SEAL OPENED: A WHITE HORSE (6:2)

**<sup>2</sup>And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.**

What period of time do the seals cover? Some interpreters see them relating to the entire period from the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus until His coming again. Others see them relating to the last seven years of history on the earth. (See "Perspectives" for differences of views.) All interpreters agree that the seals relate to the certainty of God's judgment on those who reject Him.

**Verse 2.** *And I saw . . . a white horse.*—In each of the first four seals one of the living creatures gives a command, "Come." Some have interpreted this as a summons to Christ to come in power and victory. Others understand this to be a summons to the four horsemen.

The identity of this first horse has been variously interpreted. Since the other three horses in verses 3-8 are evil powers of destruction and death, some interpreters believe the white horse to be similar in kind. Therefore, many interpret this horse to be conquest in general.

Others picture the white horse as man's last failing effort to bring order to earth while Christ is still rejected. It represents the world's attempt to pull things together after the church has been raptured from the earth.

Still another view focuses on the color white. In the identification of the other three horsemen the color is of great significance. This view would point out that in Revelation white is a symbol of Christ or of something associated with Christ. This view does not see the rider as Christ Himself but as a symbol of the proclamation of the gospel of Christ in all the world.

*He that sat . . . had a bow.*—Some feel that the key to the interpretation of this first horse is the rider's bow, an instrument of war in the ancient world which was used by the Parthians. They were a war-like people living in Asia southeast of the Caspian Sea. They were famous in war for their skill in the use of the bow and arrow. They were one of Rome's most dangerous foes. Therefore, they were used as a symbol of conquering power.

## SECOND SEAL OPENED: A RED HORSE (6:3-4)

<sup>3</sup>And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. <sup>4</sup>And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

**Verses 3-4.** War has always been one of the great afflictions which the human race suffers.

*Another horse that was red . . . to take peace from the earth.*—After the opening of the second seal, the second living creature summoned a red horse whose rider was permitted to take peace from the earth. He was given a great sword, another instrument of warfare and bloodshed. Although the rider is not said to have killed anyone, by his taking peace away people will proceed to kill one another. The word “kill” has a meaning like “slaughter” or “butcher.” Some interpreters see the red horse as a symbol of civil wars that will continuously plague the earth.

## THIRD SEAL OPENED: A BLACK HORSE (6:5)

<sup>5</sup>And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

Wars are often followed by scarcity and famine. The first horseman carried a bow. The second carried a sword. The third merely has a pair of scales, but it symbolizes a great weapon. It is the power of commerce to create inflation or depression.

**Verse 5.** *A black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances.*—The black horse with its rider carrying a pair of scales represents scarcity. The scales were used for measuring out grain. Conditions were described as being so dreadful that it would take a full day's wage to buy wheat for one meal (v. 6). The scales or balances symbolize trade and commerce. The message of this third seal is that the last days will be typified by economic tensions. Many people will live hand-to-mouth.

Although the black horse represents a condition of want, some interpreters do not believe that it is a picture of acute famine conditions. They understand this as the beginning of the great tribulation period but not the actual great tribulation.

#### FOURTH SEAL OPENED: A PALE HORSE (6:8)

<sup>8</sup>And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Death for many people is a major result of war and famine. Therefore, the pale horse ridden by Death is a logical sequel to the previous horses and riders described in verses 1-6.

**Verse 8.** *A pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death . . . Hell followed.*—The fourth horseman was summoned in the same way as the first three, by one of the living creatures (v. 7). The color of the horse is unusual. The color was yellowish green. The word “pale” here translates a Greek word usually meaning *green*. Death was the rider of this strange horse, and his inseparable companion, Hell (Hades), followed. The destructive forces of Death and Hell are combined and personalized. Death is pictured as riding along as his servant Hell follows and gathers the slain.

*Power was given . . . to kill.*—This emphasizes that the power of Death and Hell are subject to God’s control and restraint. The power “given” to Death and Hell was the power to kill. War was commonly followed by famine, pestilence, and wild beasts, which multiplied in depopulated areas. The use of the fraction one-fourth indicates that this judgment is limited in its scope. This destruction will not be total.

#### FIFTH SEAL OPENED: CRIES OF FAITHFUL MARTYRS (6:9)

<sup>9</sup>And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

**Verse 9.** *Under the altar the souls . . . that were slain.*—Who are the martyrs? Some see these martyrs as a symbolic representation of the martyrs of all the ages. Others understand these martyrs to be from the great tribulation period after the church has been raptured.

In Leviticus 4:7 the blood of beasts sacrificed on the altar was to be poured out at the base of the altar. The souls of the martyrs were seen under the altar as though they had been sacrificed on the altar and their blood poured out at its base. Thus the martyrs may be viewed as sacrifices offered to God. The souls of the martyrs under the altar was a vivid way of picturing the fact that they had been martyred in the name of their God.

*Word of God.*—These martyrs had been “slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.” Some see the statement “the word of God, and the testimony which they held” as evidence that this includes Christian martyrs of all the ages, but with particular emphasis on those martyred in the end-time.

#### **INTERLUDE: SEALING OF 144,000 SERVANTS (7:2-4)**

<sup>2</sup>And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, <sup>3</sup>Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. <sup>4</sup>And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

After the opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17), there was an interlude which involved the sealing of the servants of God (7:1-8). This vision provided assurance of the security of God’s people in view of the calamities revealed with the opening of the seals.

**Verse 2.** *Another angel . . . from the east.*—The four angels (v. 1) were addressed by another angel. The direction he came from was appropriate for in the Bible God’s gracious manifestations were often connected with the east. Paradise was set in the east (Gen. 2:8) and the glory of God came to the temple from the east (Ezek. 43:2).

*Seal of the living God.*—The seal probably was a symbol of God’s ownership on His people to protect them from the plagues which were shortly to fall on humanity.

*Four angels.*—The four angels stood at the four corners of the earth and held back four winds (v. 1). Why did they restrain the winds in this manner? Winds are a natural symbol of destruction. The four winds were to be restrained from destruction until God’s people could be sealed (v. 3). The winds here apparently were emblems of judgment.

**Verse 3.** *Hurt not the earth . . . sea . . . trees.*—Some interpreters see these as symbols of the environment; others, as symbols of humanity. “Hurt not” indicates that the restraining power of God was holding back the winds of judgment until the safety of the people of God had been made secure. The judgments are God’s judgments, and they are in the controlling power of God. This simply means that all the agencies of nature, all the instruments of judgment, are in God’s hand.

**Verse 4.** *A hundred and forty and four thousand.*—Who are the 144,000? Some interpreters understand the 144,000 to represent converted Israel



during the great tribulation after the church has been raptured. The sealing of the 144,000 is a symbol of God's protecting these Jewish converts during the tribulation sufferings. These sufferings are caused by the opposition of the Antichrist.

Another view is that the 144,000 are to be identified as spiritual Israel—the church. This view would conclude that the church is sealed that it may be protected from the plagues which express God's wrath. Some relate this protection of the church to the great tribulation while others relate it more generally to the entire period of church history. (See "Perspectives.")

The number 144,000 is derived from multiplying 12 times 12 times 1000. Many believe that this represents all the people of God, the 12 tribes of the Old Testament plus the 12 apostles of the New Testament multiplied by 1000, a number of completeness or fullness.

#### **INTERLUDE: THE GREAT MULTITUDE (7:9)**

<sup>9</sup>After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

At the conclusion of chapter 6, as the end-time was introduced, the question was asked, "Who shall be able to stand?" (6:17). In chapter 7, that question was answered. Those who are able to stand are those described as the 144,000 and the great multitude.

**Verse 9. A great multitude.**—The great multitude was so large that no one was able to count it. They came from all nations, kindreds, people, and tongues. This piling of one expression on another indicates the crowd's universality. Some see the naming of tribes and all peoples and kindreds as an indication that this is spiritual Israel rather than physical Israel. Others see the great multitude as the Gentile nations who will be converted during the great tribulation period through the witness of Jewish missionaries. (See "Perspectives.")

The redeemed were dressed in white robes. The word used to identify the robes signifies a long robe. The white robes probably point us to justification. The saved stand before God perfect in the righteousness which Christ supplies. White is also the color of victory. Palm branches signify the joy of victory.

#### **INTERLUDE: THE FUTURE OF THOSE IN WHITE ROBES (7:14)**

**<sup>14</sup>And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

The theology behind the great tribulation is the age-long conflict between God and Satan. Our Lord's ministry was a conflict with Satan and demonic powers. The mission of our Lord on this earth was to decisively defeat the devil (Matt. 12:28-29).

**Verse 14.** *Sir, thou knowest.*—John's answer to one of the elders (v. 13) showed great respect, recognizing that the elder was qualified to answer that question himself.

*Great tribulation.*—The idea of a great tribulation appears several times in the New Testament and goes back to Daniel 12:1: "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." The Lord Jesus reechoed these words from Daniel in Matthew 24:21. (See "Perspectives" for various views.)

*Have washed their robes.*—The symbolism of dirty clothes for an unclean life is frequent in the Old Testament (Isa. 64:6). Isaiah had spoken of God's forgiveness making sins that are as red as crimson to become white as wool (Isa. 1:18). This imagery expresses the effectiveness of Christ's redemption in the lives of His people. The Lamb who forgives sin is the Lamb who enables His followers to share His victories.

## **TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON**

1. *Christians are challenged to understand the tragedies and difficulties of life.*—Jesus taught that His followers would face tribulations in this life.

2. *God loves the world.*—The great multitude which is made up all languages and ethnic groups should challenge us to witness to everyone.

3. *Christians have a responsibility to interpret the difficulties of life to unbelievers.*—The puzzles of life give great opportunity for Christians to share their faith. We are to be living examples.

4. *The sealing of the 144,000 gives us assurance that God protects His people and keeps His promises.*—This number denotes that the group is complete. No one is missing. God assures us that He will preserve us through times of trouble.



Courtesy of the Republic of Turkey

Smyrna, where one of the churches in Revelation was located.

July 26, 1987

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to identify some statements of God's judgment of evil and protection of the redeemed, and to explain how assurance of salvation can motivate them to be faithful regardless of the cost

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) Prepare the commitment slips for Step 7 (Kit item 7); (3) Prepare a chart as called for in Step 4 showing the events of the first four seals (Kit item 8). (4) If you use *Biblical Illustrator* enlist a member (Kit item 2d) to read the article "Horses in the Ancient World" in the current issue and report on it during the class.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains the following helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 2d—"FOR NEXT WEEK" Assignment Slips; Item 7—Commitment Slips; Item 8—Chart: First Four Seals.

**A LESSON PLAN:** Revelation 6:2-5,8-9; 7:2-4,9,14

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Share the following: Two pastors were talking informally over coffee at a local restaurant. One said, "Even if I believed in 'once saved, always saved,' I wouldn't preach it. If my members thought they were so secure in salvation as never to face any risk of becoming lost, I could not keep them motivated to live good lives and serve in the church." Ask: What misunderstanding did the speaker reveal about eternal security? How does a strong belief in such a doctrine motivate Christians to be faithful? Invite members to turn to Revelation 6 to study about both judgment for the evil and assurance for the redeemed.

**2** *To help members get a grasp of this new unit of study:* Display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). Read the lesson titles which make up this new unit.

**3** *To help members understand the varying opinions about the time of the seals:* Point out that Revelations 6—7 tells of the opening of the first six of the seals mentioned in 5:1. Point out that opinions vary as to the time referred to in the judgments of the seals. Number 1 to 3 down the left side of the chalkboard. Beside number one, write: Judgments in history. Explain that some interpret the seals to refer to divine judgments throughout human history. Beside number two,



write: Future judgments preceding Christ's return. Explain that others believe the seals speak of intense judgments from God just prior to the second coming of Christ. Beside number three, write: Judgments in the tribulation period (following the rapture of the church). Explain that some see the seals to be describing judgments that will occur after the church has been caught up to be with Christ. Across the bottom of the board, write: God's judgment is certain on those who reject Him. Emphasize that this basic truth is common to all views.

**4** *To help members identify some statements of God's judgment of evil:* Prepare the following poster and display it on the focal wall (Kit item 8):

#### The First Four Seals

Seal	Scripture	Horses	Description of Riders	Symbolizes
1st	6:1-2	white horse	has bow and crown	
2nd	6:3-4	red horse	has sword	
3rd	6:5-6	black horse	has scales	
4th	6:7-8	pale horse	named hell	

Divide members into four groups of one or more persons. Assign each group one of the four seals. Ask each group to agree on a single word that expresses the divine judgment symbolized by each rider. Suggest the groups consider the color of the horses, the names of the riders, and the objects given to the riders or held by them. Allow 3 to 4 minutes for groups to work, then call for reports. Fill in the poster as each group reports.

Use the "Perspectives" and the "Focal Passage Study" to identify the rider on the first horse. The other riders will be more obvious. (Possible answers: conquest, war, famine, death.)

If you made the assignment (Kit item 2d) in the *Illustrator* ask the person to share relevant information at this time.

**5** *To help members identify some statements of God's protection of the redeemed:* Ask one member to read 6:9-11. Have the others listen for words or phrases which suggest God's protection. (Possible answers: souls under the altar, white robes, rest for a little season.) Ask what is meant by referring to the souls "under the altar" (6:9). Use the "Focal Passage Study" to identify these martyrs. Suggest that regardless of the view taken, the point of the vision of the martyrs suggest protection in time of death by God.

**6** *To help members explain how assurance of salvation can motivate them to be faithful regardless of the cost:* Ask a volunteer to read 7:2-4. Use the "Background Passage Overview" outline to point out the interlude (Rev. 7) between the sixth and seventh seals.

Use the "Focal Passage Study" to explain the following: the angel from the east, the four angels, and the earth, sea, and trees that are not hurt.

Refer to the "Perspectives," the "Focal Passage Study," and *Bible Book Study Commentary* to discuss various views about who the 144,000 are. (Converted Israel during the great tribulation, spiritual Israel—the church, all of God's people from both the Old and New Testament periods) Suggest that the important feature is their sealing. Explain the significance of being sealed. (Ownership, protection)

Point out how the assurance of God's ownership and protection motivates us to faithfulness rather than presumption. Write on the board, "Factors that motivate us." Ask members to suggest what motivates them in all areas of life. (Possible answers: fear of punishment, hope of reward, approval by others, challenging goals, love, gratitude). Then ask members to identify the two most powerful motivators on the list so far as Christian service is concerned. Ask several to explain their choices. Ask, Which factors motivate those who have assurance of salvation to remain faithful to God?

**7** *To help members see that great numbers of people respond to faithful witnessing:* Ask a volunteer to read aloud 7:9,14. Ask, What is most significant in these verses? (Possible answers: the great multitude, the wide range from which the multitude was gathered, the description of the multitude.) Encourage responses to include what makes each feature significant. Use the "Focal Passage Study" to identify this multitude. (Spiritual Israel or the church, the Gentile nations who will be converted during the great tribulation, literal or physical Israel) Mention the "great tribulation." Ask, What does this verse suggest about the effectiveness of witnessing for Christ? Give members a commitment slip (Kit item 7) on which they can list some of the steps they will take to share the gospel with others. One way of reaching people is through Outreach Bible Study.

# Six Trumpets Announce Judgment and Woes

**Background Passage:** Revelation 8:1 to 9:21

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 8:1-3,13 to 9:4,11,20-21

**Central Truth:** The failure of mankind to repent in spite of the plagues of God's judgment demonstrates how people resist God's efforts to bring them to repentance.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. Silence and Prayers Before the Trumpets Are Blown (8:1-6)
2. First Trumpet: Hail, Fire, and Blood (8:7)
3. Second Trumpet: A Burning Mountain Hurled (8:8-9)
4. Third Trumpet: A Great Star Called Wormwood (8:10-11)
5. Fourth Trumpet: The Heavens Darkened (8:12)
6. The Eagle's Three-Woe Warning (8:13)
7. Fifth Trumpet: Locusts Arrayed for Battle (9:1-12)
8. Sixth Trumpet: Four Angels of Destruction Loosed (9:13-19)
9. Mankind Refuses to Repent (9:20-21)

The new series of visions, inaugurated by the opening of the seventh seal, forms a dramatic message of God's judgment on an ungodly and rebellious civilization of earth.

*Silence and prayers before the trumpets are blown (8:1-6).*—The time for opening of the seventh seal had arrived. a hush fell over heaven in anticipation of what was about to take place. The seventh seal introduced seven angels with seven trumpets. Before the seven angels sounded their trumpets, another angel focused on the prayers of all saints. The prayers of the saints were offered with smoke rising from an incense burner. As the time of the sounding of the trumpets arrived, there were demonstrations from nature such as thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Time of trumpet judgments (chaps. 8-9)	Temporal judgments against Roman Empire, applying throughout history	Great tribulation; church still on earth throughout period	Great tribulation; church raptured from earth before period begins
Trumpets 1-4 (chap. 8)	Fall of Roman Empire through natural calamities	God's wrath falls on a civilization that gives allegiance to Antichrist when choice is very clear; first four trumpets involve natural catastrophes	(1) Judgment on people who refuse gospel; (2) judgment on great world-church (3) judgment on apostate church leader of great influence; (4) judgment on people who reject Christ and follow cults
"Woe, woe, woe" (8:13)	All views agree they are the same as trumpets 5-7		
"Star" (9:4)	Personified evil	Represents an angelic figure divinely commissioned to carry out God's purpose	The leader of apostasy during the great tribulation
"Sealed" (9:4)	Protection of God's people from internal decay of Roman Empire	Church, which will go through great tribulation	Those saved after church is raptured
Locusts, fifth trumpet (9:3-4)	Internal decay bringing fall of Roman Empire	Symbolic of actual demonic forces released during great tribulation, inflict torture	Predicts disastrous results that will come through demonically led people following apostate religious leader during great tribulation
Army from East, sixth trumpet (9:13-19)	External attack bringing fall of Roman Empire	Symbolic of actual divine judgment on corrupt civilization, inflicts death	Literal invasion of West by army from East

*First trumpet: hail, fire, and blood (8:7).*—When the first angel sounded the trumpet, calamities of hail, fire, and blood caused a third part of the trees to be burned up and all the green grass burned up.

*Second trumpet: a burning mountain hurled (8:8-9).*—With the sounding of the second trumpet, a third part of the sea was affected by a great



mountain burning with fire which had been cast into the sea. A third part of the creatures of the sea were killed and a third part of the ships of the sea were destroyed.

*Third trumpet: a great star called Wormwood (8:10-11).*—With the sounding of the third trumpet, a great star fell on one-third of the rivers of the earth. The star burned like a lamp and was called Wormwood. This caused a third part of the waters to become wormwood and many people died from drinking the bitter waters of the rivers which had been affected.

*Fourth trumpet: the heavens darkened (8:12).*—With the sounding of the fourth angel's trumpet a third part of the sun, the moon, and the stars was affected. A third of the light of each of these sources was cut out, resulting in darkness.

*The eagle's three-woe warning (8:13).*—Before John heard the trumpet of the fifth angel sound, he saw and heard an eagle flying through the midst of heaven saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth." (See "Focal Passage Study" for comments on "eagle.")

*Fifth trumpet: locusts arrayed for battle (9:1-12).*—When the fifth angel's trumpet sounded, John saw a star fall from heaven to the earth. The star represents a being who was given the key of the bottomless pit. In this vision, John saw the fallen star opening up the bottomless pit, out of which came a gigantic cloud of smoke and many locusts. These locusts did not attack the earth but people on the earth. However, those who had the seal of God on their foreheads were protected from their sting. Terrible pains were the lot of those who were plagued by these strange locust creatures. They had a king over them which was called "the angel of the bottomless pit." His name in Hebrew was "Abaddon," or in Greek, "Apollyon."

*Sixth trumpet: four angels of destruction loosed (9:13-19).*—The sixth trumpet was blown and four angels were released that they might kill a third of humanity. These angels had been bound at the Euphrates River awaiting the precise moment for their activity to begin. When the four angels were released, a tremendous number of "horsemen" went forth. They were unlike any earthly creatures known. They were released into the world to torment and kill one-third of humanity.

*Mankind refuses to repent (9:20-21).*—Although the plagues of judgment were terrible, still those who were not killed refused to change their mind and attitude about their sinful ways of life.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### SILENCE AND PRAYERS BEFORE THE TRUMPETS ARE BLOWN (8:1-3)

<sup>1</sup>And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. <sup>3</sup>And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

All heaven is waiting in breathless expectation. What will God do next?

**Verse 1.** *The seventh seal.*—The opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17) was followed by an interlude in which God's protection of His people was portrayed (7:1-17). In chapter 8, the opening of the seals was resumed with the seventh seal.

*Silence in heaven.*—John had seen the instruments of judgment, the demand for judgment, the terror of the wicked at the approaching judgment, and the provision for God's people during judgment. Now, there was a half-hour silence in heaven before the sounding of the seven trumpets (v. 2). Some interpret the half-hour silence as being symbolic of delayed judgment. The delay was illustrated in the restraining of the winds (7:1-3). Others believe that the silence was a holy hush that fell over the heavenly hosts as they trembled in suspense in view of the judgments of God which were about to fall on the world. As the time of the end was about to be revealed, there was a silence in dreadful anticipation of the coming events.

Before this time, heaven had been filled with sounds of praise and worship. Suddenly there was an intense silence. Heaven waited in breathless expectancy for the judgment to fall and the kingdom to come. God's actions were sometimes introduced by a reference to silence (Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13).

**Verse 2.** *Seven angels stood before God.*—Standing before God here means serving God. Seven was the number of fullness and completeness.

*Seven trumpets.*—Trumpets were used primarily to announce. They were used also to call to battle or retreat. The first four trumpets announced natural catastrophes (vv. 7-12) similar to some of the plagues at the Exodus that affected all in Egypt who were not protected by the blood of a lamb. The final judgments also will affect all not sealed with God's mark (7:3). Again the number seven indicates that God's judg-

ments will be full and complete.

**Verse 3. Another angel.**—Some interpreters see this angel as Christ. They find it difficult for any created angel to offer incense with the prayers of the saints to make them acceptable to God. Others believe that this angel was serving in some way to assist communication between God and the saints. They point out that the angel Gabriel brought Daniel the answer to his prayer for God's help (Dan. 9:20-22).

*Prayers of all saints.*—The people of God can participate in God's purposes and actions. Their prayers are vitally important. The prayers referred to here were accepted and God's judgments would come on the world in answer to the prayers of the saints (vv. 4-5).

The mingling of incense with the prayers (vv. 3-4) is either a symbolic representation of the prayers themselves, offered to God by the angel, or it is regarded as a sacrificial accompaniment of the prayers, that they may be acceptable to God in virtue of the sacrifice of Christ.

Prayer does not take place in vain but reaches God and moves the power of heaven. God's people may appear insignificant to the world but in the sight of God they are vital.

### THE EAGLE'S THREE-WOE WARNING (8:13)

<sup>13</sup>And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

**Verse 13. An angel flying.**—Some of the oldest Greek manuscripts have the word for "eagle" here instead of "angel." Interpreters from all viewpoints generally agree that the word for "eagle" probably is the correct Greek text here.

An eagle has the strength of wings to soar high in the sky. It flew in "the midst of heaven" where it could be clearly seen and had "a loud voice" so it could be clearly heard.

*Woe, woe, woe.*—This was a warning of more things to come. The threefold woe corresponds to the three trumpets yet to sound. The judgments of God on the unbelieving world was intensifying. Their effects will be far more drastic than those that had preceded. The first four judgments involved the elements of nature which indirectly affected a rebellious world. These next three judgments affect humanity directly.

*Inhabiters of the earth.*—This expression designates a world that is hostile to God. Here again it is implied that the plagues of divine wrath fall on the rebellious, evil society, but that the people of God, which have

been sealed with the protective seal of God, are spared from suffering these plagues. (See "Perspectives" for differing views identifying the people of God.)

#### **FIFTH TRUMPET: LOCUSTS ARRAYED FOR BATTLE (9:1-4,11)**

<sup>1</sup>And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. <sup>2</sup>And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. <sup>3</sup>And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. <sup>4</sup>And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

.....  
<sup>11</sup>And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

**Verse 1.** *A star fall from heaven.*—Angels were sometimes called stars (Rev. 1:20), therefore it seems possible that this star represents an angel. Some understand the star to represent some angelic figure divinely commissioned to carry out God's purposes. "Fallen" is used because that is the way stars come from the sky to earth. It is symbolic of the angelic being that has descended from heaven to earth.

Some see this as a fallen religious leader referred to under the third trumpet (8:10), a person whose influence over man is so great that when he falls the third part of men are poisoned because of his evil influence.

*To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.*—The "him" refers to the being represented by the star. He was given a key. Some understand the key to be a symbol of authority. The fact that the key was "given" shows that God is in control. The star-being has no independent power.

The Greek word from which "bottomless pit" comes is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament of "the deep" in Genesis 1:2. It is also used of "the depths" of the earth in Psalms 71:20 and came to designate the realm of the dead. In Revelation 11:7 it is the abode of the beast or Antichrist before he appears on earth, and will be the temporary prison of Satan during the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 20:3). It is also sometimes represented as the home or else the place of imprisonment of demons (Luke 8:31). That Satan is locked up in the pit for a thousand years (Rev. 20:3) is interpreted by some to mean that he is not the angel



to whom the key was given.

**Verse 2.** *Smoke out of the pit.*—This dense smoke may symbolize a demonic force of evil from the underworld, which clouds men's minds and darkens their understanding.

**Verse 3.** *Out of the smoke locusts upon the earth.*—This plague is a host of demonic locusts who attack the bodies of men but do not kill them. Background for this may be a plague of locusts in Joel 2:4-10 related to the coming of the day of the Lord. The appearance of the locusts in Joel was like horses who run with the rumbling of chariots, who charge like mighty men of war, who darken the heaven with their number. The difference is that in Joel a plague of actual locusts was envisioned, while in Revelation the locusts are symbolic of demonic hosts.

*Give power, as the scorpions.*—Once again the word "given" reminds us of the limitations of the power of evil. The demons can exercise only that power which is given them by God. God is always in control.

**Verse 4.** *Should not hurt the grass . . . any green thing . . . any tree.*—That these are not literal locusts seems evident by the fact that they do not hurt the grass, or any green thing, the very opposite of which literal locusts would do.

*Men which have not the seal of God.*—This refers to God's seal for the protection of His people (7:3). This verse gives the purpose of that sealing. Regardless of who one interprets the people of God to be here, or to what period of time this refers, they will be protected by God. However, they will be the victims of persecution from the forces of evil.

**Verse 11.** *Had a king over them.*—"The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands" (Prov. 30:27). However, unlike real locusts these have a king over them. This king probably is Satan. We would expect Satan to be their king. He fits the description, "the angel of the bottomless pit." He is further described as "the destroyer," in both Hebrew (Abaddon, uh-BAD-uhn) and Greek (Apollyon, uh-PAHL-yuhn).

## **MANKIND REFUSES TO REPENT (9:20-21)**

<sup>20</sup>And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: <sup>21</sup>Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

It is sobering reality that so many are not moved to repent by the most

terrible of calamities.

**Verse 20.** *Rest of the men . . . repented not.*—The plagues of suffering, terrible as they seem, are designed to turn men to repentance before it is too late. God pours out His judgments on men, not because He takes pleasure in wrath, but rather to warn that rejection of Christ leads to disaster.

**Idols.**—Idols can be viewed from two different perspectives. In and of itself, an idol has no real existence (1 Cor. 8:4). Idols like gold, silver, brass, stone and wood are lifeless. However, in another sense, demons (“devils”) are seen to stand behind idol worship (1 Cor. 10:20). Sacrifice to idols involves one in partnership with demons. This tension between idols as lifeless and yet symbolic of demons appears in this passage. One would think that the rest of humanity, who are not killed by these plagues, would learn a lesson and repent. But, they continue in their defiant ways of worshiping demons and idols.

**Verse 21.** *Neither repented . . . of their murders . . . sorceries . . . fornication . . . thefts.*—The defiance of humanity not sealed with God’s seal (v. 4) is reflected not only in their idolatry but also in their immorality. Ungodliness issues in all kinds of wickedness. The word “sorceries” is used here to designate the use of magic potions and charms in incantations and degraded religious practices, such as religious experience with the use of drugs. The word for “fornication” refers to sexual sin in general.

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *The prayers of God’s people affect life on the earth.*—God has willed that the prayers of His people should be part of the process by which He acts. The interaction between the sovereignty of God and the prayers of the saints is a part of the mystery of God.

2. *God’s judgments are to lead persons to repentance.*—He does not take pleasure in wrath, but rather He seeks to warn that rejection of Christ leads to eternal death.

3. *God sustains Christians in face of evil.*—Harm that comes from following evil teaching is greater than physical harm. God has never promised His people protection from physical harm or even martyrdom. But He has promised protection from the forces of evil which do greater destruction to our lives.

4. *When persons refuse to respond to God’s love, they become prey to horrifying demonic forces.*—They suffer the consequences of their choice, which not only affects life now, but results in eternal death.



Pergamos, where one of the churches in Revelation was located.

August 2, 1987

Illustrator Photo/David Rogers

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to explain the meaning and significance of the six trumpet judgments, and to commit themselves to new efforts that will reach lost prospects who have been difficult to reach

**BEFORE CLASS:** Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). Prepare the poster called for in Step 3 (Kit item 9).

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains these helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 9—Time Relationship of Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 8:1-3,13 to 9:4,11,20-21

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Share the following illustration: "Jonathan was twenty-three years old. He had used drugs regularly for several years. He was finishing college and realized that his life was empty and void. He had never worked or had any real goals in life. Occasionally, he had attended a Bible study on campus with his roommate. Jon decided he would go and talk to the leader to see if he had any answers. After the study Jon asked to speak privately with the man who had led the group that evening. Jon explained his predicament, the empty feeling he had, and wanted to know what he could do to fill that empty feeling.

The Bible study leader shared with Jon how he could invite Jesus Christ into his life. Jon readily admitted that this sounded like what he needed. However, he said he could not give up using drugs. The teacher realized that using drugs had become a god in Jon's life. Jon struggled with the decision to accept Christ, but he decided he would rather have his drugs than to take a risk on something else. The Bible study leader sat and sadly watched Jon walk out of the room."

Not every person will be saved regardless of how hard we try. God honors each person's freedom of choice.

**2** *To help members understand the varying opinions as to the time of the trumpet judgments:* Ask members to locate the "Perspectives" in their quarterlies and read the first heading in the left-hand column. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the three views concerning the time of the trumpet judgments. Emphasize that common to all views is the conviction that God judges evil wherever and whenever He finds it.





be reassured that God hears and remembers the prayers of His people or that divine judgment comes on the world in answer to the prayers of the saints.)

**5** *To encourage members to commit themselves to God's work in light of the opposition:* Ask a member to read 8:13 to 9:4 and 9:11. Use the "Focal Passage Study" to explain the threefold "woe" of 8:13. Write on the board and explain: bottomless pit, smoke of the pit, locusts from the pit, angel of the pit. Ask, What does such fierce opposition suggest about the quality of our commitment to God's work?

**6** *To remind members they can abide safely in God's care in light of His sovereign control over evil forces:* Ask members to read 9:4 again silently to see the limitations God placed on the locusts from the bottomless pit. (cannot hurt the earth's vegetation nor persons protected by God's seal in their foreheads )

**7** *To challenge members to be faithful witnesses in light of the evidence that some people will not respond to the gospel:* Ask someone to read aloud 9:20-21 while the others identify the reaction of those who survived. Use the "Focal Passage Study" to explain the possible connection between demonic activity and idolatry. Suggest a similar relationship between demonic influence and the sins named in 9:21. Explain sorceries and fornications in this context. Ask, Do you ever feel that some evil is causing widespread human cruelty and perversion? Ask, what is the saddest fact in 9:20-21? (The plagues' survivors refused to repent.) Ask, In spite of such defiance, what is a Christian's responsibility toward the lost? (To maintain a godly life and to give a verbal witness)

**8** *To encourage members to commit to new efforts to reach those who have been difficult to reach:* Ask members to think of persons who have been difficult for your class or church to reach for Christ. Ask members to suggest why some people are so difficult to reach. Write these reasons on the board. With the list of reasons before the class, consider each reason and ask, Can we do anything to overcome this reason? Conclude by challenging members to try again to reach some of those who have so far rejected Jesus.

<sup>1</sup>James E. Taulman, *Encouragers: The Sunday School Worker's Counseling Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), page 49. Used by permission.

# The Little Book and the Two Witnesses

**Background Passage:** Revelation 10:1 to 11:19

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 10:9-10; 11:1-4,7-8,11,15,18

**Central Truth:** John's eating the little book and measuring the Temple, the experiences of the two witnesses, and the coming of Christ's kingdom challenge Christians to faithful witnessing.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. A Mighty Angel Announces the End (10:1-7)
2. The Bitter and Sweet Book (10:8-11)
3. The Measurement of the Temple (11:1-2)
4. The Power of the Two Witnesses (11:3-6)
5. The Witnesses Killed and Disgraced (11:7-10)
6. The Witnesses Revived and Called to Heaven (11:11-13)
7. Seventh Trumpet: The Kingdom Has Come (11:14-19)

Before the sounding of the seventh trumpet there was an interlude (10:1 to 11:13). After this interlude, John recorded the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15).

*A mighty angel announces the end (10:1-7).*—John saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. The angel held an open scroll or little book in his hand. Then the mighty angel lifted his hand to heaven and, with the authority of the Eternal God, declared that there should be no more delay. The time had arrived for the completion of God's redemptive purpose.

*The bitter and sweet book (10:8-11).*—Then John was told to get the little scroll from the mighty angel. He was told to eat the scroll and at first it would taste like honey, but then it would make his stomach sour. He was further told that he must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tribes, and kings.

*The measurement of the temple (11:1-2).*—John was given a measuring stick and told to go and measure the temple of God, including the inner court where the altar stood, and to count the number of worshipers. He was instructed not to measure the outer court.

*The power of the two witnesses (11:3-6).*—Two witnesses will be given

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Little Book (10:2,8-10)	Revelation from God of conflict brought by His judgments (chaps. 12-22)	Commission to pro- claim God's word of judgment to rebel- lious people	Same as the seven- sealed book of chap- ter 5
Temple area and its mea- sure- ments (11:1-2)	God's people under His care throughout history	Prophecy of preser- vation of faithful rem- nant of believing Jews	God's protection of redeemed Jews in earthly Jerusalem during the last half of great tribulation
Outer court (11:2)	Pagans	Jewish people tram- pled by Gentiles; God's judgment for apostasy	Jewish people tram- pled by Gentiles dur- ing last half of great tribulation
Forty-two months (11:2); 1,260 days (11:3)	Indefinite duration of pagan desolation	A symbolic number representing period of evil with special refer- ence to last days of age	Half of seven-year tribulation period
Two wit- nesses (11:3-10)	Spread of gospel in first century	Two actual historical persons at end of time who witness to Israel	A witnessing remnant of Jews in Jerusalem testifying to the com- ing kingdom and calling Israel to repent
Sodom and Egypt (11:8)	Rome as seat of Empire	Earthly Jerusalem	Earthly Jerusalem
Two wit- nesses revived from death, great fear on viewers (11:11-12)	Power of gospel despite Roman perse- cution; even Christ's enemies will see that God won	Literal resurrection from death resulting in conversion of Israel	Two witnesses liter- ally brought back to life; Israel sees and is amazed but no real repentance indicated
Seventh trumpet (11:15)	Promise that God will one day claim the victory that already is His	Announces victori- ous outcome: includes woes (seven bowls) of 16:1-21	Announces the arrival of the millen- nial kingdom

power to prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sack-cloth. These two prophets were described as two olive trees and two candlesticks standing before the God of all the earth. They will be protected from harm and empowered for their task.



*The witnesses killed and disgraced (11:7-10).*—When the witnesses complete their period of testimony, a tyrant would come out of the bottomless pit and declare war against them and conquer and kill them. For three and a half days their bodies would be left exposed in the streets of a great city, identified as the place where their Lord was crucified. No one would be allowed to bury them, and people from all nations would gaze at them. The rejecting world would rejoice and give presents to one another to celebrate the death of the two prophets who had tormented them so much.

*The witnesses revived and called to heaven (11:11-13).*—After three and a half days, God brought them back to life and they stood up. Great fear fell on everyone who saw them. The revived witnesses heard a loud shout from heaven, “Come up!” They rose to heaven in a cloud as their enemies watched. In that same hour there was a terrible earthquake that leveled a tenth of the great city, leaving thousands dead. Those who were left were terrified and glorified the God of heaven.

*Seventh trumpet: the kingdom has come (11:14-19).*—The seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven, praising God for the coming of His kingdom. The twenty-four elders also joined in this expression of praise. The temple of God was seen opened in heaven and the ark of the covenant was in plain view. Lightnings, thunderings, and other actions of nature emphasized God’s presence and power.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### THE BITTER AND SWEET BOOK (10:9-10)

<sup>9</sup>And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. <sup>10</sup>And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

Six of the seven trumpets have sounded. We would expect now the sounding of the seventh trumpet, but instead there is inserted a vision of a great angel who comes down from heaven with a little book in his hand, which John is required to eat.

**Verse 9.** *The angel.*—This angel was called “another angel” in verse 1. This was possibly to distinguish him from the angel of 8:3 or from the angels of the seven trumpets. Some interpreters understand the description of this angel to be a description of Christ Himself. Others interpret this angel as an angel of vindication. The message which the angel gave

to John was to be prophesied to vindicate the acts of judgment by Almighty God. The warning given by the six trumpets had been sufficient but man still had refused to repent. Therefore, there was to be no more warning, no more delay.

*The little book.*—Some interpreters understand this “little book” to be a revelation from God of the conflict brought by His judgments on the earth. Others understand the content of the little book to be a commission to continue to proclaim God’s word of judgment and woe to a rebellious people on the earth. Still others see the little book as the same book already introduced in chapter 5.

*Take it, and eat it up.*—John was commanded to eat the little book. This seems to indicate that the message of the little book was to become a part of the messenger as a prerequisite to its delivery. The message must become a part of the messenger if it is to become real both to him and to those to whom he delivers it.

**Verse 10.** *Sweet . . . bitter.*—The sweetness and bitterness of the message of the scroll seems to refer to the two-fold reaction of John. He found God’s word to be sweet as honey in his mouth. But as he digested the message and pondered its implications, it became bitter in his stomach. It is important for us to realize that the Word of God contains a word of judgment as well as mercy. We should never take delight in warning others of the wrath of God or find satisfaction in proclaiming divine judgments.

## THE MEASUREMENT OF THE TEMPLE (11:1-2)

**<sup>1</sup>And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. <sup>2</sup>But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.**

In chapter 11 we have a continuing explanation of the interlude between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets.

**Verse 1.** *A reed like unto a rod.*—The “reed” was commonly grown in the Jordan valley and had many uses, one of which was as a measuring rod. There was obviously more to this measuring process than merely determining the size of a temple. Worshipers were measured as well as the Temple. But how does one measure a worshiper? Some believe that the measuring concept is referring to evaluation according to God’s standard. God judges His own people to cleanse them and to purify

them. He judges His enemies to punish and banish them.

Others see the thought of measuring as that which is marked off as belonging to God. Often in the Bible when God spoke of measuring anything, the thought is implied that He was marking it off as that which belongs to Himself.

*Measure the temple.*—The measuring of the temple, its inner courts, and those who worship there probably is a symbol of God's preservation and protection. Some would interpret this as a symbol of the protection of the early Christians from the tyranny of Rome.

Some commentators believe that the very use of the word "temple" focuses on the Jews and interpret this as a prophecy of preservation of a faithful remnant of believing Jews during the end-time period. Some see this as a picture of the redeemed Jews in Jerusalem during the last half of the great tribulation. These interpreters believe that a temple will be rebuilt on the site of the ancient temple of Jerusalem.

Other interpreters see the temple as a symbol of the church, pointing out that the Jewish temple had been destroyed some twenty-five years before. Therefore, they conclude that the temple referred to here is "the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16), the church. Some see this as a symbol of the divine protection of the church during the great tribulation period.

**Verse 2.** *The court . . . leave out.*—The temple and the inner court were separated from the outer court—the Court of the Gentiles—which was not to be protected. Some understand the outer court here as a symbol of the rebellious civilizations of the world. Others suggest that this is a contrast between Jews who are true worshipers of God and Jews who are still nonbelievers. The nonbelievers will be trodden down by the nations, the rebellious world. They will fall under the divine judgment because they have refused to repent.

*The holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.*—Some interpret the forty-two months literally. Some relate the forty-two months to a period of Satanic power in the world, with particular reference to the final days of the Antichrist. Other interpreters see this as an indefinite length of time referring to the entire period from Christ's crucifixion and resurrection to His second coming. They interpret that the people of God are to suffer at the hands of Satanic evil throughout the course of the age.

## **THE POWER OF THE TWO WITNESSES (11:3-4)**

<sup>3</sup>And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

**‘These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.**

The fact that two witnesses are introduced in this section of the Revelation indicates that God will not abandon His people.

**Verse 3.** *Will give power unto my two witnesses.*—A valid testimony required two witnesses (Deut. 19:15). Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). Some interpreters see the two witnesses as two actual persons at the end time who will witness to the Jewish people. Others see them as a Jewish remnant witnessing to Jews. Still others take the two witnesses as symbolic of the spread of the gospel during the first century in spite of persecution.

*Clothed in sackcloth.*—This was the usual garb of the prophets and indicates the prophetic nature of the witnessing. It is associated with penitence and mourning.

**Verse 4.** *Two olive trees . . . two candlesticks.*—Many interpreters believe that this is an allusion to the vision of Zechariah in which he saw a golden lampstand with seven lamps, flanked by two olive trees (Zech. 4:1-3). In view of John’s use of the lampstands earlier in the Revelation to represent the churches, some interpreters believe that these witnesses are the church.

The witnesses are said to have power to shut heaven, so that it rain not and power over waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with plagues, as often as they will (v. 6). Therefore, some interpreters believe that the two witnesses will be Moses and Elijah brought back to the earth. Others have indicated that the witnesses will prophesy in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah.

### **THE WITNESSES KILLED AND DISGRACED (11:7-8)**

<sup>7</sup>And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. <sup>8</sup>And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

**Verse 7.** *Finished their testimony.*—Until their mission is complete, they are protected from destruction. But when they have accomplished their task, they are allowed to fall prey to the wrath of the beast. The use of the word “finished” means that the testimony has reached its end or its aim. The witness was not cut short. They accomplished their task.

*The beast . . . shall make war against them.*—Here is the first mention



of the beast. The beast is of Satanic origin and power and is said to have come from the "bottomless pit" from which the plague of the fifth trumpet came (9:1-3). Some interpret the beast as a federation of nations that will revive the Roman Empire in the end time. When the two witnesses have fulfilled their divinely appointed mission, the beast is allowed to make war on them and to kill them.

Some see the beast as the Antichrist, a central figure in the Revelation. The beast was a familiar concept to the first-century Christians. The idea goes back to Daniel 7 where a succession of great world empires is symbolized by the appearance of four fierce beasts. Paul wrote about a "man of sin" whom many identify as the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

Some would interpret the beast to be the Emperor of Rome, or the entire Roman Empire in the first century. Others would see the beast representing every hostile evil power that has or will oppress and persecute God's people, but primarily a figure at the end of the age.

The beast is allowed to make war on the two witnesses and kill them. War means a spiritual conflict. In the present passage, war is simply conquest by whatever means, not necessarily by military weapons. Some see this as a symbol or reference to the martyrs that will die during the tribulation period.

**Verse 8. Dead bodies.**—The idea that the bodies lie in the street unburied is seen by many as a symbol of the world's attitude toward the witnesses. If the ancient world refused to bury a dead person, it represented outrage and indignity shown. The fact that the witnesses have been stopped makes the world happy and it demonstrates and emphasizes its scorn and contempt. The spirit of slavery, like Egypt, and wickedness, like Sodom, and oppression and murder, like Jerusalem, have characterized the world's attitude toward the church throughout the ages.

**The great city.**—What is the identity of the great city? The city was identified in two ways. First, it was spiritually called "Sodom and Egypt." The two names were connected with wickedness and oppression. The city was also identified as the place where the Lord was crucified. Some believe that this is symbolical and no earthly city is meant. The great city is every city and no city. It is civilized man in organized community. Others interpret this to be first-century Rome. Others interpret the great city as the literal Jerusalem of the end time which has worshiped the Antichrist and the Beast, and shall sink at last to the level of Sodom, from which Lot was only saved by fire, and Egypt, out of which Israel of old was delivered by God.

With the death of the witnesses the whole world seems to congratulate one another that there is no longer any voice raised to call into question

their wicked ways. It is man in organized community and opposed to God.

### **THE WITNESSES REVIVED AND CALLED TO HEAVEN (11:11)**

**<sup>11</sup>And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.**

**Verse 11.** *After three days and a half.*—Some interpret these three and a half days as the last half of the great tribulation period. Others see this as a symbolic number designating a time of calamity or evil.

Some understand this to be a symbol of the church that has been oppressed to the very verge of extinction, but has been resurrected or has been raised up by God to continue its mission. (See "Perspectives" for further comment.)

*Great fear fell.*—The resurrection of the witnesses was accompanied by great fear. The great fear that fell on those who beheld this resurrection has been interpreted in various ways. Some see this as a fear that does not lead to genuine repentance. Others see this as symbolically showing that Christ's enemies will be shown that He has in fact won. Still others see this as referring to the Jewish people as a whole who will respond to the witnesses and be converted.

### **SEVENTH TRUMPET: THE KINGDOM HAS COME (11:15,18)**

**<sup>15</sup>And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.**

.....  
**<sup>18</sup>And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.**

John concluded the interlude about the angel and the little book and the measuring of the temple. He returned to the sounding of the seven trumpets which he had interrupted. The time of the seventh trumpet is the time of the period of the end.

**Verse 15.** *The seventh angel sounded.*—There are various views as to the time of the blowing of the seventh trumpet. Some see the trumpet as ushering in the millennial kingdom. Others see the trumpet, an instru-

ment of victory, as a promise that God one day will claim the victory that is already His. (See "Perspectives.")

*Great voices.*—The opening of the seventh seal was followed by silence in heaven (8:1). In contrast, the sounding of the seventh trumpet was accompanied by many voices in heaven. These heavenly voices announced that the time of the end had come but the end was not yet described. The voices were not identified, but they evidently were the heavenly host.

*Kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.*—One of the central themes of the Book of Revelation is the establishment of the kingdom of God. This involves the wresting of authority from hostile powers, including the godless nations of the earth, and the exercise of all authority by the Lord and His Christ.

*Verse 18. The nations were angry.*—In the end time the nations on the earth will rage because the Lord God Almighty has taken His great power and has begun to reign. Not all are going to believe. Throughout the course of history, many have rejected God. This will happen in the end and there will come a final expression of the rage of the rebellious world.

*The time of the dead . . . judged.*—Some believe that this eighteenth verse covers the entire millennial kingdom period and carries us on to the judgment of the wicked dead, to the end of time. God's judgment does not take place until the time is right. God cannot establish His Kingdom in its fullness until He has visited His wrath on the rebellious civilizations of the world.

There also will be a rewarding of those who have served God. Two groups are singled out: the prophets and the saints. "Saints" designates God's people in general.

*Destroy them which destroy.*—This is a phrase which means that God's judgment will not be haphazard or arbitrary, but will be suited to the conduct of those who fall under His wrath.

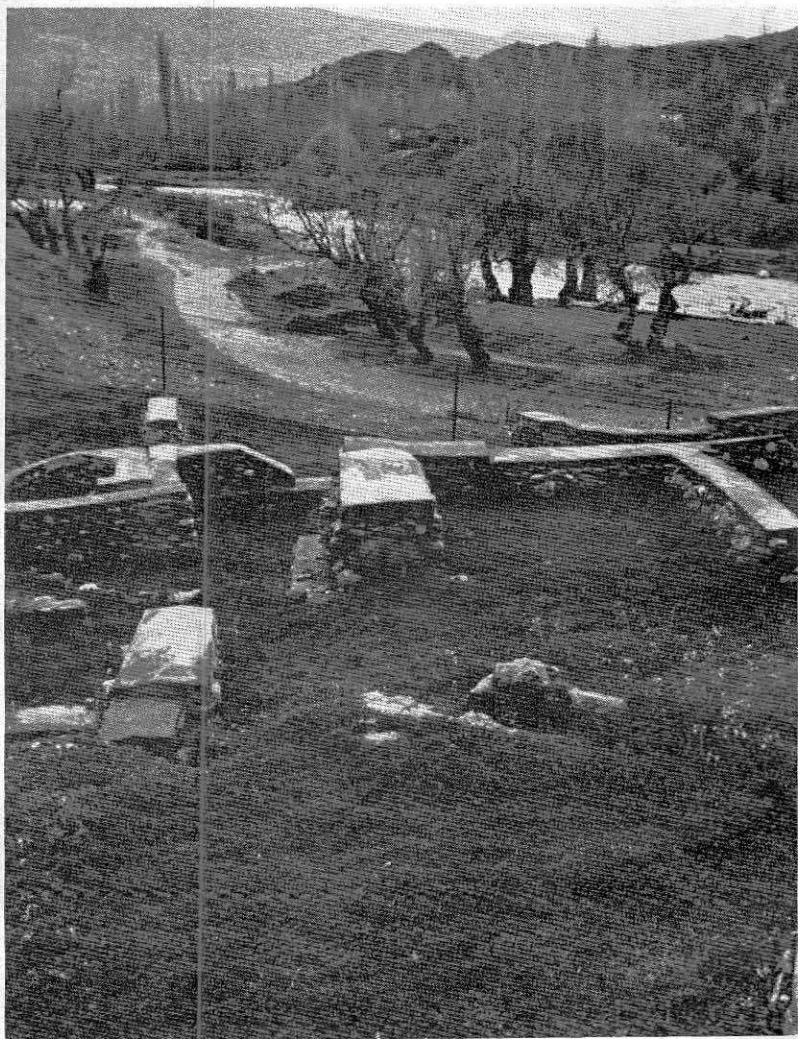
## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *God's message must be shared with a genuine compassion.*—If we follow the example of the Lord, we will weep over those on whom God's judgment falls. We must always teach the love of God and this will be a delight to the Christian. But we must with a broken heart proclaim the judgments of God.

2. *God's people can expect opposition from a world that is hostile to the gospel.*—But God always gives the power to be an effective witness in all circumstances.

3. *God has promised His people victory regardless of the difficulties faced.*—In some circumstances, Christians may be called on to face death and disgrace in order to be a faithful witness. The reviving of the witnesses from the dead encourages us that even persecution and death do not affect the Christian's future with God.

4. *Every individual must either reject or accept God's love during this life.*—The fact that life is coming to a conclusion should challenge the lost to accept Christ as their personal Savior while there is opportunity.



Sardis, where one of the churches in Revelation was located.

Illustrator Photo/David Rogers

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to explain the meaning and significance of the four events of Revelation 10—11, and to determine ways they can be better witnesses in preparation for the coming of Christ's kingdom

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) Prepare the poster called for in Step 2 (Kit item 10). (3) Prepare the assignments called for in Step 4 (Kit item 11). (4) For use in Step 5, copy the words of Revelation 11:15 on a large sheet of paper. (5) Provide paper and pencils for use in Step 6.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains these helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 10—Four Events of Revelation 10—11; Item 11—Group Assignments; Item 12—Poster: Revelation 11:15.

**A LESSON PLAN:** Revelation 10:9-10; 11:1-4,7-8,11,15,18

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Ask members which they would prefer to do if they were medical doctors who had just discovered a patient had a dread disease that only on very rare occasions responded to any known treatment. Would they prefer to tell the patient the very worst message about the illness and the prospects for recovery in the hope he might be one of those few who respond to the treatment so that they might be able later to be the bearer of good news to him? Or, would they prefer to emphasize the possibility of a good response to their prescribed treatment in order to lift his spirits for the time being and knowingly run the risk of having to come back later as the bearer of bad news? Ask, Which approach do you consider would be ultimately in the best interest of your patient, and why? Ask members to join you in the study of a passage that tells how John found the bearing of the bad news of judgment to be a bitter experience.

**2** *To understand the significance of the command for John to eat the little book:* Prepare and display a poster giving the major events covered in this lesson: the eating of the little book, the measuring of the Temple, the death and resurrection of two witnesses, and the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Kit item 10).

Ask someone to read aloud 10:9-10 while the others listen to discover John's actions. Write two phrases on the board: sweet in the mouth, bitter in the stomach. Ask why this was a bitter-sweet experience for



John: (sweet to be given a word from God but bitter because the word was one of judgment) Ask, To what extent should a Christian witness emphasize God's judgment when urging another to receive Christ? Conclude this part of the discussion by asking, What attitude should one have who warns others of such judgment? (Compassion)

**3** *To understand the significance of measuring the Temple:* Ask members to read silently 11:1-2 and suggest three specific items John was to measure and one he was forbidden to measure. Write them on the board as they are suggested. Give out slips of paper on which you have written the following ideas as to the significance of what John was told to do. Call for each idea to be read aloud.

**Reader 1:** A measuring rod might have suggested an evaluation according to God's standard. God judges to cleanse and purify His people, but to punish His enemies. John may have understood a divine evaluation was being made.

**Reader 2:** The measuring could have been similar to the work of a surveyor. John may have understood he was marking off the boundaries of God's possession.

**Reader 3:** John's action could be seen as drawing boundaries about that which God would protect. All on the outside of the measured boundaries would be left without divine protection.

After the readers have finished, ask members to indicate which idea they feel was most nearly what John understood his task to be. Ask, What or who were symbolized by the three items John was to measure? (The protection of the early Christian from the oppression of Rome; the preservation of a faithful remnant of believing Jews during the tribulation; or the protection of the church during the tribulation) Emphasize that God takes responsibility for the spiritual well-being of His people in all places and at all times as long as they are faithful and obedient.

**4** *To understand the significance of John's vision concerning the two witnesses:* Divide members into three groups of one or more. Make the following assignments (Kit item 1). (If possible, provide each group a copy of the comments on these verses from this quarterly and *Bible Book Study Commentary*, or some other study helps.)

**Group One**—The significance of the power given the two witnesses (11:3-4): (1) Who or what is represented by the two witnesses? (2) Why was power given them? (3) What was the significance of the 1,260 days?

**Group Two**—The significance of the murder and disgrace of the two witnesses (11:7-8): (1) Why were the two witnesses killed and disgraced?

(2) Where did this take place? (3) Who or what is represented by the beast?

**Group Three**—The significance of the reviving and ascension of the two witnesses (11:11): (1) What was the significance of the three and a half days? (2) What realization resulted in the great fear that befell the onlookers? (3) What basic message might the outcome of the two witnesses have conveyed to the first readers of Revelation?

Allow 4-5 minutes for discussion, then ask groups to share their answers.

**5** *To understand the significance of the sounding of the seventh trumpet:* Remind members that 11:15,18 completes the series of trumpet soundings. Explain briefly the opinions as to the time covered by this trumpet's sounding. (See comments in the "Focal Passage Study" as well as the "Perspectives.") Write on the board: The victory of Christ, the judgment of the wicked, the reward of the saints. Ask members to read the focal verses silently to find what is said about each of the phrases. Explain each of the three ideas—the final victory will belong to Christ, the wicked will be judged, and the righteous will be rewarded—to encourage any members who are lost to accept Christ. Refer to the poster of Revelation 11:15 (Kit item 12) to make this emphasis.

**6** *To challenge members to determine ways to be better, more aggressive witnesses:* Give each member a sheet of paper on which to list ways to become a better witness. Ask each one to write the following possibilities: read a book about how to witness, order a supply of gospel tracts to give out, study the module *Training Sunday School Workers in Evangelism*, plan to go witnessing with a more experienced personal witness, seek a special conference on witnessing which you may attend. Ask members to add to the list. Ask members to circle the idea they feel would best help them become better witnesses. Close in a prayer of commitment.

# 3

UNIT

## THE GREAT WONDER AND THE SEVEN VIALS

REVELATION 12:1 to 16:21

August 16

### The Dragon's War on the Woman

**Background Passage:** Revelation 12:1 to 13:18

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 12:1-6, 11-12; 13:1-3, 18

**Central Truth:** The visions of the woman and manchild, dragon, and two beasts emphasize God's care for Christians as they face challenges to their faith.

#### BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. Description of the Woman and the Dragon (12:1-3)
2. The Woman and Her Child Rescued (12:4-6)
3. War in Heaven (12:7-9)
4. Announcement of Victory and Warning (12:10-12)
5. The Dragon Attacks the Woman (12:13-17)
6. The Beast from the Sea (13:1-4)
7. The Beast's Ungodly Power (13:5-10)
8. The Beast from the Earth (13:11-18)

Many believe this is the key chapter in the Revelation because it reveals the source behind the conflicts on earth, the struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

*Description of the woman and the dragon (12:1-3).*—John saw a dazzling sight—a pregnant woman. He called the sight a “great wonder” or sign. He also saw a red dragon which had seven heads and ten horns,

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Woman (12:1-6)	True people of God under Old and New Covenants (true Israel)		Indicates Israel, not church; key is comparison with Genesis 37:9
Great red dragon (12:3)	All views identify as Satan		
Manchild (12:4-5)	Christ at His birth, life events, and crucifixion, whom Satan sought to kill	Christ, whose work Satan seeks to destroy	Christ but also the church (head and body); caught up on throne indicates rapture of church
Wilderness flight (12:6)	God will preserve His people when they face persecution	God will protect His people during the great tribulation	Indicates last half of great tribulation period to which text jumps; text does not deal with church age at all
War in heaven (12:7-10)	Effort to storm heaven itself; symbolic of constant spiritual battle but may also be literal	Not specific in historical time, used in Luke 10:18; victory came in the cross	Will occur at time of rapture of the church
1,260 days (12:6)	Indefinite time	Symbolic number representing period of evil with special reference to last days of age	First half of great tribulation after church is raptured
Sea beast (13:1)	Emperor Domitian, personification of Roman Empire (same as in chap. 17)	Antichrist, here shown as embodiment of the four beasts in Daniel 7	A new Rome, satanic federation of nations that come out of old Roman Empire
Seven heads (13:1)	Roman emperors	Great power, shows kinship with dragon	Seven stages of Roman Empire; sixth was imperial Rome (John's day); last will be federation of nations
Ten horns (13:1)	Symbolize power	Kings, represent limited crowns (ten) against Christ's many	Ten powers that will combine to make the federation of nations of new Rome

Wounded head (13:3)	Nero "revived" as Domitian	Symbol includes beast, not just his head, severely wounded or killed but revived or reappeared in another person	Roman Empire would cease to exist but would reappear in the federation of nations of new Rome
Earth beast (13:11)	<i>Concilia</i> , Roman body in cities responsible for emperor worship	Organized religion as servant of first beast during great tribulation period; headed by a false prophet	Antichrist, who will head apostate religion, a Jewish leader described in Daniel 11:36-45 (some identify as assistant to the Antichrist)
666 (13:18)	Imperfection, evil; personified as Domitian	Symbolic of evil, short of 777; if a personage meant, he is unknown but will be known at proper time	Not known, but will be known when time comes

and seven crowns on his heads.

*The woman and her child rescued (12:4-6).*—The power of the dragon's tail swept across the sky and dragged a third of the stars and flung them to the earth.

The dragon stationed himself in front of the woman who was about to be delivered, so that he might devour her child as soon as he was born.

She gave birth to a boy who was to rule all nations with his strong hand. Her child was caught up to God and to His throne. The woman fled into a wilderness where she was protected by God for 1,260 days.

*War in heaven (12:7-9).*—A war broke out in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels. They were defeated and forced out of heaven to the earth. The dragon was identified as the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.

*Announcement of victory and warning (12:10-12).*—A loud voice in heaven said that the power and the kingdom of God had come. This was because the one who accused the brethren day and night before God had been thrown out of heaven. This made it tough for those who dwell on the earth because the dragon was angry as he realized his time was short.

*The dragon attacks the woman (12:13-17).*—When the dragon found himself cast down to earth, he persecuted the woman who had given birth to the child. However, the woman was given two wings like those of a great eagle so that she could fly to safety for a period of time. The dragon was furious with the woman and went to make war on the rest of her children—those who kept God's commandments and confessed



they belonged to Jesus.

*The beast from the sea (13:1-4).*—A strange creature rose up out of the sea. It had seven heads and ten horns, and ten crowns on its horns. Its heads committed blasphemy. The creature looked like a leopard but had bear's feet and a lion's mouth. The dragon gave the creature his power, throne, and authority. One of its heads had a deadly wound, but it was healed. All the world was amazed at the creature.

*The beast's ungodly power (13:5-10).*—The beast was permitted to blaspheme God and to wage war against God's people and overcome them. He also was given power over nations. God's people were encouraged to have patience and faith because the beast's power would be brought to an end.

*The beast from the earth (13:11-18).*—Another beast came rising up out of the land. He had two horns like a lamb but spoke like a dragon. He exercised the power of the first beast and required people to worship the first beast. He did amazing acts and deceived people everywhere. He ordered the people of the world to make a statue of the first beast. He gave the statue life and made it speak. He ordered that everyone who refused to worship the statue must die. He required everyone to be stamped with a mark on their right hand or forehead. No one could buy and sell without this mark. (See "Perspectives" and "Focal Passage Study.")

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### DESCRIPTION OF THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON (12:1-3)

<sup>1</sup>And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: <sup>2</sup>And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. <sup>3</sup>And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

Chapter 12 describes in symbolic terms the heavenly warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. It explains to God's people on earth why they must face such satanic evil and persecution. Verse 1. This vision of the heavenly warfare between God and Satan has its counterpart on earth in the conflict between the people of God and demonic evil. The vision represents the struggle in the spiritual world which lies behind the events of history.

*A great wonder in heaven.*—The Greek word for "wonder" here is the usual word for "sign" (John 20:30). It also can be used to designate a

striking phenomenon.

*A woman clothed with the sun.*—Some interpreters believe this woman represents Israel, the people who gave birth to the Messiah. Others believe she is a symbol of both the true Israel in the Old Testament and the people of the Messiah in the New Testament, the ideal people of God—the church. All of the views interpret this woman as the people of God on earth, whether Israel or the church.

“Clothed in the sun” describes the glory and majesty of her appearance. The “moon under her feet” helps to enhance the heavenly glory of the woman. The “crown of twelve stars” also adds to the focus on the importance of the woman’s appearance. It also may be symbolic of the twelve patriarchs and of the twelve tribes of Israel. Some would include the twelve apostles.

**Verse 2.** John saw the woman in heaven as one waiting to give birth to a child.

*With child.*—Many in the ancient church identified this woman with Mary the mother of Jesus. This interpretation is still current in the Catholic tradition. They see this as a reference to the historical birth of Jesus. Others see the birth as denoting the travail of the community from which the Messiah has arisen. The symbolism of Israel as a travailing mother is found several times in the Old Testament (Isa. 66:8; Jer. 4:31; Mic. 4:10).

**Verse 3.** At the time when the child was about to be born, John saw another sign in the sky, a red dragon. He may be described as “red” because he is a murderer and destroyer.

*Another wonder in heaven; . . . a great red dragon.*—The dragon represents Satan (v. 9). This kind of figure appears in a number of Old Testament contexts with various names. Daniel used a similar figure (Dan. 7:7,24). In Revelation the dragon represents the devil who inspires the evil political powers of history.

*Seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns.*—The seven heads symbolize fullness. The dragon has full cunning for the execution of his plans. A horn was a symbol of strength, so the ten horns symbolize great power. All the forces of evil are represented in this dragon. The seven crowns are a symbol of a blasphemous claim to sovereignty.

## THE WOMAN AND HER CHILD RESCUED (12:4-6)

<sup>4</sup>And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. <sup>5</sup>And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of

iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. 'And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

**Verse 4.** John wrote about the whole Christ-event with this simple, yet powerful description.

*His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven.*—Some interpreters see this as a reflection of a war between Satan and the angels of heaven. Others see this large dragon as a symbol of Satan's power.

*The dragon stood before the woman.*—She was about to give birth to her child. The dragon awaited the birth of the child with the intent to destroy it as soon as it was born. Some see this as a reference to the threats to Jesus' life throughout His earthly life. Others relate this description to all of Satan's efforts to defeat Christ and His church.

**Verse 5.** The third major character in this drama is introduced, the man-child.

*She brought forth a man child.*—Some interpreters believe that this is the New Testament church destined to reign with Christ. Others interpret the child as Christ Himself. (See "Perspectives.")

*Rule all nations with a rod of iron.*—The rod of iron is a symbol of power and authority. Whether the child is Christ or the church reigning with Him, power is given to rule over the earth. (Compare Ps. 2:7-9).

*Caught up.*—Some see this as a statement of Christ's resurrection, ascension, and enthronement. However, others see this as the rapture of the church. Still others understand this to be the victory of Christ over every satanic effort to destroy Him.

**Verse 6.** John saw the gracious provision and protection of God for the woman.

*The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God.*—Some understand this to be a symbol of God preserving His people in all ages. Others interpret this as Israel in the time of great tribulation fleeing to a place prepared by God. Some interpret this as God preserving His church during the tribulation.

Some see a parallel between the people of the new covenant being sheltered and sustained by God in the last days, and the people of the old covenant marching through the wilderness to the Promised Land under the care of God.

*A thousand two hundred and threescore days.*—This is also three and one half years. Some see this as the entire time between Christ's ascension and second coming. Others interpret the three and one half years as a

period during the great tribulation. This interpretation sees the church as having already been raptured from the earth.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENT OF VICTORY AND WARNING (12:11-12)**

<sup>11</sup>And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

**Verse 11.** John was shown that the real source behind all the conflicts of the ages is the war between God and Satan portrayed in dramatic focus.

*They overcame him.*—Whether these are New Testament believers or Jewish believers in the tribulation, the fact is that the blood of Christ is the source of their power to overcome Satan. The “him” is the great dragon, the accuser of the believers, the slanderer and deceiver of the whole world. The overthrow of the devil signifies the coming of the Kingdom of God. His power has been broken (vv. 9-10). Even though he has intensified his efforts to control the nations and destroy the work of God, the extent of his influence has been limited and his days have been numbered (v. 12).

*The blood of the Lamb.*—The overthrow of Satan was not through Michael but through the power of the sacrifice of Christ and His resurrection. He died for sinners and has been vindicated by His resurrection and ascension to God’s throne. Thereby the age of divine victory and power over evil, the sovereignty of God and the authority of the Christ, has been initiated.

*By the word of their testimony.*—The redeemed conquered by receiving the Word testified to them and confessing it by faith. This means the testimony passed on to them became the testimony made by them. Confessors of Christ participate in the conquest of the Lamb over the devil, sin, and death as they know Him as Redeemer and confess Him as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10).

*Loved not their lives unto the death.*—Though they did not foolishly seek a martyr’s death, they did not regard their own lives as supremely precious. They were faithful even to the point of death.

**Verse 12.** Although it will be difficult for believers on the earth, all of heaven is seen rejoicing because the time of the devil is nearing an end.

*Rejoice, ye heavens.*—Those in heaven rejoiced because of the great

victory spoken of in verse 10, where salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of God are described as having come.

*Knoweth that he hath but a short time.*—In comparison with the age to come in which Christ will reign for ever and ever, the time of the dragon's wrath is short!

Some interpret this as the time near the end of the great tribulation. Some believe that the church will go through this time, others believe the church will be raptured before. Others believe that the "short time" here refers to the time from Christ's ascension until His second coming.

### THE BEAST FROM THE SEA (13:1-3)

<sup>1</sup>And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. <sup>2</sup>And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. <sup>3</sup>And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

**Verse 1.** John was shown a strange beast rising up out of the sea. (See "Perspectives.")

*I stood upon the sand of the sea.*—Some Greek manuscripts read, "he stood," indicating that the dragon himself (12:17) stood on the sand of the sea. He stood beside the sea in order to call forth an ally in the battle against the offspring of the woman. The text continues with the words "and I saw." Therefore, John was watching the scene.

*A beast rise up out of the sea.*—The fact that this beast rises out of the sea is taken by some to indicate that he comes from the great mass of humanity, namely the Gentile powers of the world. Others take it as a reference to the Mediterranean Sea, meaning that the beast will arise from the Mediterranean area. Some understand the beast to be the revived Roman Empire during the great tribulation of the end-time.

*Seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns.*—This description shows that this beast is related to the dragon (12:3). Some consider the seven heads as the symbol for the Roman emperors, embodied in Domitian in John's day. Others interpret this description as referring to the remnants of the confederacy which formed the Roman Empire in the beginning and will be manifest as a revived empire in the end-time.

The "ten crowns" are the symbols of governmental authority. The



"name of blasphemy" probably refers to the practice of putting the Roman emperors on a level with God, an act of blasphemy.

**Verse 2.** *The beast . . . like unto a leopard . . . feet of a bear . . . mouth of a lion.*—Some understand the beast to be a single individual of great power in the end-time. In addition to these natural symbols of strength is the added factor of satanic power coming from the dragon, Satan himself.

This selection of three animals is similar to the revelation given in Daniel 7, where successive world empires are described as the lion, the bear, and the leopard. This has led some to interpret the beast as nations of the earth. This beast gathers all these elements and characteristics in itself and is far more dreadful in its power and blasphemy against God than the preceding world empires. Satan ("the dragon") gives his power to the beast.

**Verse 3.** The ways of Satan are appealing and attractive to most of the world.

*One of his heads as it were wounded to death . . . deadly wound was healed . . . world wondered after the beast.*—Some see this as the reviving of the Roman Empire during the great tribulation. The empire as such died, but one like it will rise again in the end-time. Satan is the power of both.

Others interpret this to mean an actual person who has been wounded to death and restored to life. This view holds that John was referring to the Roman belief that Domitian was really Nero returned to life. Of course, John's use of this belief symbolically does not mean that he endorsed it. Still others relate the imagery to a more general idea that Nero would be restored to life in some other Roman ruler. (See "Perspectives.")

## THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH (13:18)

<sup>18</sup>Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

**Verse 18.** Just as God's mark, the Holy Spirit, is on every believer, so Satan has his mark of ownership on every unbeliever.

*Number of the beast.*—A second beast came up out of the earth, which had the appearance of a lamb but spoke like a dragon. This second beast's objective is to cause the world to worship the first beast. It is achieved with a sense of religious motivation (vv. 11-15). False religion is used as a force to cause the world to follow the world's godless governments.

A special challenge is given to the readers of the Revelation concerning the numeric symbol of the beast. There have been endless speculations as to what or whom the number represents. Some have thought it represented the Roman emperor. One explanation which many accept is that the triple six is the number of man. Six is short of seven, a number of perfection. This number refers back to the beast and limits him to man's level which is far short of the deity of Jesus Christ. It is possible that the number is intended to be a symbol of the best that man can do, which falls short of adequacy. It is a human number. (See "Perspectives.")

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *Christians are involved in the conflict between God and Satan.*—The conflict between God and Satan projects itself on the earth as conflicts among people.

2. *This conflict between the people of God and the followers of Satan calls for perseverance and faith.*—It is easy for believers to be discouraged as they see what appears to be victory for the forces of evil in the world. Therefore, God's people must continuously trust and obey regardless of the difficulties of the time.

3. *This conflict also gives challenge for wisdom and understanding.*—John said that the beast out of the earth would look like a lamb, but speak like a beast. The false religious power of the world which motivates the way the world behaves is a constant source of confusion and conflict for every Christian. Thus, it is vitally important for the Christian to study the Bible in order to have understanding and wisdom.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to interpret the visions of the fierceness of Satan's attack and how the victory over Satan will be won, and to identify an area of life in which Christ can help them overcome Satan's attacks

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) Display the poster, Questions About the Beast (Kit item 13), covering it as called for in Step 3. (3) For use in Step 4, prepare the poster on Revelation 12:11-12 (Kit item 14).

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains the following helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 13—Questions about the Beast; Item 14—Poster: Revelation 12:11-12.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 12:1-6,11-12; 13:1-3,18

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Introduce this lesson by telling the story of Glenn Cunningham, one of the world's great est distance runners. As a boy he was burned so badly it was expected his legs would have to be amputated. He did not give up. His legs were saved. However, they said he would not walk again. Still he did not give up. He made himself a pathway along a picket fence and other similar objects to which he could hold. He disciplined himself with a will of steel. Not only did he walk, he began to run. He ran nearly every place he went. Finally, Glenn Cunningham became one of the world's greatest distance runners. Someone's triumph over seemingly impossible odds inspires us. Challenge members to discover how believers will overcome Satan's attacks.

**2** *To identify the significant features of the great wonders in heaven which appeared to John:* Ask members to identify two scenes called wonders in heaven, as a member reads aloud 12:1-4. (a woman about to give birth and a great red dragon) Divide into two groups. Assign one of the wonders to each group. Ask them to determine what each wonder means. Suggest they look at the "Perspectives" for alternative interpretations held by the three millennial views. Allow about five minutes for this.

As the group that considered the woman with child reports, list answers to the question, What or whom did she represent? (Possible an-

swers: Mary, the mother of Jesus; Israel, the nation that produced the Messiah; the church, as God's true people) Call for ideas as to the significance, if any, of her clothing and crown.

As the group that discussed the dragon reports, list all terms used to answer the question, How does Revelation 12 identify the dragon? (Possible replies: serpent, Devil, Satan, deceiver, accuser) Call for ideas as to the significance, if any, of his color, heads, horns, crowns, and tail.

Read 12:5-6 aloud, asking both groups to share ideas about the meaning of the "man child," His being caught up to God, and the woman's flight into a wilderness. Mention that the child represents Christ or the church. Point out what the catching up to God means if applied to Christ and if applied to the church. Be sure the woman's stay in the wilderness is explored if seen as Israel or as the church, with some discussion about the time period, whether literal or symbolic, whether present or future. *Bible Book Study Commentary* will provide help.

In order to be prepared for Satan's fierce attacks, urge members to devote themselves to a study of God's Word through some program such as seminary extension. You can secure additional information by writing Seminary Extension, 901 Commerce Street, Nashville, TN 37203.

**3** *To identify the beast which arose from the sea and the significance of its number:* Read aloud 13:1-3,18. Write the following four questions on the board, but cover them so you can present one question at a time (Kit item 13): (1) Who stood on the sand by the sea? (2) What are some of the identifications given to this beast? (3) What is the relationship between the dragon and the beast? (4) What are some interpretations of the beast's number?

Uncover the first question. Refer to the discussion of 13:1 in the member's quarterly. Ask other members to locate the verse in another translation of the Bible. Call for the two possibilities to be named (the dragon calling for his associate; John watching the developments of this wonder).

Uncover the second question. Ask some to refer to the discussion in their quarterlies and others to look at the "Perspectives." As ideas are mentioned, list them on the board. Ask two or three to indicate their preference of meaning, and tell why.

Uncover the third question. Call attention to the three words in 13:2. (Power, seat, authority) Point out that the power and authority the dragon gives the beast is more than human; it is demonic.

Uncover the final question. Write the number 666 and ask for ideas as to its meaning. Refer members to both the quarterly discussion and

the "Perspectives." (Possible answers: Domitian, Nero, Caesar, Hitler, the Antichrist) Allow enough ideas to be named to caution about recklessly identifying some current figure. Emphasize that believers possess not the mark of the beast but the seal of God (7:3).

**4** *To understand how Satan, in spite of his fierce opposition, was overcome.* Ask a member to read 12:11-12. Prepare the following poster (Kit item 14). Your answers should be similar to the italicized answers below.

Revelation 12:11-12				
The ones who overcame	The one they overcame	How they overcame Him	Reason they Overcame	The Result of Overcoming
<i>Our brethren (v. 10)</i>	<i>The accuser (Satan)</i>	1. <i>Blood of the Lamb (v. 11)</i> 2. <i>Word of Testimony (v. 11)</i>	<i>Loved not their lives unto the death (v. 11)</i>	1. <i>Rejoicing in heaven (v. 12)</i> 2. <i>Woe in earth (v. 12)</i>

As members provide the answers for each column. Use the material in the "Focal Passage Study" and *Bible Book Study Commentary* to explain each of the phrases.

**5** *To identify an area of life in which Christ can help them overcome Satan's attacks:* Ask members to think of areas in their lives in which they need help to overcome Satan's power. (a habit, a recurring sin, an inability to accomplish some Christian service, or such like) Ask members to write their names on a piece of paper and place them in envelopes and seal them. Collect the envelopes, mix them up so members will not get their own and distribute them to the group. Ask the person to pray each day this next week for the person whose name is in the envelope without opening it. Suggest they open the envelope next Saturday and call the person and tell him or her they have prayed for them this week. Close with a prayer that all might be overcomers through Christ's help.



# Salvation and Judgment Proclaimed from Heaven

**Background Passage:** Revelation 14:1-20

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 14:1,3-4,6,8-10,13-15

**Central Truth:** John's vision of the new song of redemption, coming judgments, and harvest reapings challenge Christians to be faithful and the lost to accept Christ.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5)
2. First Angel Announces Judgment Has Come (14:6-7)
3. Second Angel Announces Fall of Babylon (14:8)
4. Third Angel Announces Doom on Image-Worshippers (14:9-11)
5. Blessings Declared for the Faithful (14:12-13)
6. The Harvest of the Earth (14:14-20)

Chapter 14 continues the interlude following the seventh trumpet (11:15).

*The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5).*—John saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. The 144,000 were seen standing with Him. John heard a mighty choir in heaven, accompanied by harps, singing with such force they sounded like the roar of a great waterfall or rolling thunder. They sang a new song before the throne of God, the four living beings, and the twenty-four elders. No one could sing this song except those 144,000 who had been redeemed for God from among humanity.

*First angel announces judgment has come (14:6-7).*—An angel came flying through heaven, carrying the eternal Good News to preach to everyone on earth. In a loud voice he cried that all should fear God and worship Him who created all things. The time of His judgment had

**Evangelistic Lesson:** This periodical is designed to highlight the Bible's evangelistic message in all passages in which it occurs. However, this lesson especially lends itself to being designated as an evangelistic lesson.

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
144,000 on Mount Zion (Zion) (14:1)	Total body of redeemed in heaven		Redeemed Jews gathered in earthly Jerusalem during millennial kingdom
Message of first angel (14:6)	Pronouncement that hour of God's judgment has come	Summons to repent for end is near; doom for beast and unrepentant	Final call to those of great tribulation who have rejected God; gospel of kingdom and lordship of Christ emphasized rather than grace, not contradictory but different (some believe includes proclamation of grace)
Message of second angel, doom for Babylon (14:8)	Domitian would die and Roman Empire (Babylon) would fall	Doom for Babylon, the capital city of the apostate civilization of end-time	Doom for Babylon, the great world church of end-time
Message of third angel, doom on worshipers of beast and image (14:9-10)	Those who drink of emperor worship will also drink of God's wrath	Those who continue in opposition to God will be objects of God's wrath	Those who worship beast and his image will drink from God's wrath
Time of harvest (14:14-20)	Indicates only one resurrectoin at end of time	Occurs after final struggle between Christ and Satan just before millennium	Just before millen-nium; different from later great white throne judgment
River of blood (14:20)	Symbol of infinite punishment for the wicked	Means God's radical judgment crushes evil thoroughly	Scene of wrath and carnage that will occur in Palestine

come.

*Second angel announces fall of Babylon (14:8).*—Then another angel followed the first angel shouting that Babylon had fallen. She had made all the nations of the world drink the wine of her impurity and sin.

*Third angel announces doom on image-worshippers (14:9-11).*—A third angel followed the first two. He was shouting that whoever wor-

ships the beast and his statue and receives his mark on the forehead or the hand must drink the wine of the anger of God. They will be tormented forever and there will be no rest or relief day or night.

*Blessings declared for the faithful (14:12-13).*—Encouragement was given God's people to endure patiently every trial and persecution. A voice from heaven promised those who were martyred a full reward. They shall rest from their toils and trials and their good deeds shall follow them.

*The harvest of the earth (14:14-20).*—John looked and saw Jesus sitting on a white cloud with a gold crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. An angel came and called out to Him to use the sickle to harvest the ripened earth. Jesus gathered His harvest.

Another angel came from the heavenly temple with a sharp sickle. Another angel, who had power over fire, shouted to the angel to use his sickle to cut off the clusters of grapes from the vines of the earth. So the angel swung his sickle and then loaded the grapes into God's winepress where they were crushed.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### THE LAMB AND THE 144,000 (14:1,3-4)

<sup>1</sup>And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

.....  
<sup>3</sup>And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. <sup>4</sup>These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

John moved from the beast and those who bear his mark (13:16-17) to the redeemed who bear the mark of God (14:1).

**Verse 1.** John gave his readers an anticipation of what is yet to be to steady them for the hard experiences that lay immediately ahead. This is a picture of the destiny of the people of God seen as though they were already in the Kingdom, but it awaits a future realization.

*A Lamb stood on the mount Sion.*—In chapter 7:9, the Lamb was standing before the throne in heaven. Here He is standing in the Holy City, Zion or Jerusalem. Some see this vision as a picture of the future,

end-time victory. Some see this as a symbol of heaven. Others interpret it as a literal earthly Jerusalem to which the converted Jews of the tribulation will gather.

*Hundred forty and four thousand.*—This is the same company which was sealed in 7:4-8. Some see them as a symbol of the total body of the redeemed of all ages. Others see them as Jews saved and sealed during the great tribulation. (See "Perspectives.")

Although the people of God had fallen victim to the beast because they refused to worship him, their salvation is assured. It is a vision of reassurance of their final victory in the face of martyrdom at the hands of the beast.

**Verse 3.** A new song is sung that can only be learned by the redeemed.

*A new song.*—A new song has already been sung by the twenty-four elders (5:9) magnifying the Lamb who had ransomed men by His blood to reign in His Kingdom. This present song is also about redemption, but it can be learned only by those who had been redeemed from the earth. Some, therefore, would understand that the redeemed are the singers. Others interpret the singers as hosts of angels. The source of the voice from heaven is not indicated. Whether it is a song sung by angels or the redeemed, its theme is redemption.

**Verse 4.** Those who follow the Lamb do so because they are not their own, but have been redeemed at the cost of His blood (5:9).

*Have not defiled themselves with women.*—Some interpreters understand these words to describe the hundred and forty-four thousand as a special class of Christians who had practiced a life of special self-denial and purity by abstaining from marriage. However, the Scriptures nowhere look on marriage as a defilement. In the New Testament marriage is a state to be commended.

The idea here has an Old Testament background where unfaithfulness to God was constantly described as adultery. Therefore, these one hundred and forty-four thousand are pure and undefiled in the sense that they have refused to worship the beast but have kept themselves pure unto God.

*Follow the Lamb.*—This is the positive aspect of their relationship to the Lamb. They are so loyal, they follow Him even unto death. Just as the commitment of Jesus to the will of His Father led Him to the cross, so the commitment of these believers may well lead them to sharing in His cross.

*Firstfruits unto God.*—"Firstfruits" usually designated a "part of the whole." The firstfruits was the beginning of the harvest, a partial gathering with more to follow. However, here the word probably refers to these

believers as being an offering to God through their total consecration to Him.

### **FIRST ANGEL ANNOUNCES JUDGMENT HAS COME (14:6)**

**<sup>a</sup>And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.**

**Verse 6.** John hears an angel summoning all men to repentance while there is yet time, before the last judgment falls and it will be too late.

*Another angel . . . having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth.*—In the light of the angel's announcement that the end is about to take place and judgment is about to fall (v. 7), some understand "everlasting gospel" to represent a pronouncement that the last hour of God's judgment is coming. Others understand this to be a summons to repent and receive God's mercy before judgment comes. Still others understand this as a special focus of the gospel presented especially to the Jews during the great tribulation. (See "Perspectives.")

### **SECOND ANGEL ANNOUNCES FALL OF BABYLON (14:8)**

**<sup>a</sup>And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.**

**Verse 8.** The announcement of the angel that "Babylon is fallen" is to be in the future, but it is seen as though it had already happened. The fall of Babylon is only announced here. The fall is described in detail in 17:1—18:24.

*Another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen.*—The reason for Babylon's fall is that she has caused the nations of the world to rebel against God. Babylon was the great enemy of Israel in Old Testament times. Some see this "Babylon" here as a symbol of a capital city of the final rebellious world civilization. It is a symbol of human society organized politically, economically, and religiously in opposition to and in defiance of God. Others see this as the Roman Empire of the first century. First-century Rome was likened to ancient Babylon (1 Pet. 5:13). Still others understand this Babylon to be the worldly church of the end time.

*The wine of the wrath of her fornication.*—This "Babylon" had deceived and seduced "all the nations" by the enticements and allurements of her wealth and luxuries. However, this cup of sensual delight will turn out to be the cup of God's wrath. This combines two ideas: the wine used



to intoxicate and to seduce to fornication or unfaithfulness and “the wine of the wrath of God” (v. 10).

### THIRD ANGEL ANNOUNCES DOOM ON IMAGE-WORSHIP-ERS (14:9-10)

<sup>9</sup>And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, <sup>10</sup>The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.

The call to repentance (vv. 6-7) is followed by a statement of the doom of those who refuse to repent (vv. 8-11).

**Verse 9.** Just as God marks the believer with His character (v. 1), so the unbeliever is marked by the character of Satan.

*If any man worship the beast and his image.*—God’s outpouring of judgment on a rebellious civilization has a merciful purpose; to turn sinners to repentance while there is yet time. However, the perfect reign of God and the establishment of His rule in the world also includes the necessity of the judgment of those who refuse to embrace His rule.

*His mark in his forehead, or in his hand.*—The word “forehead” may refer to human thoughts. The “hand” may refer to human actions. How the world thinks and what it does is stamped by the character and power of the beast. However, some interpreters believe the language refers to a visible mark actually on the forehead and hand.

**Verse 10.** Those who set themselves in hostility toward God must become the objects of divine wrath before God’s kingdom is fully established.

*Shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation.*—Two words are used to describe God’s judgment: “wrath” and “indignation.” These words are used together to intensify the reality of God’s wrath. The wine of God’s wrath is “poured out without mixture,” which means undiluted, full strength. It was the ancient custom to mix wine with spices and herbs to make it more tasteful. However, the wine of God’s wrath is unmixed, undiluted; it will be drunk in full strength.

*Shall be tormented with fire and brimstone.*—The lake of fire and brimstone is pictured as the final place of punishment of the beast and the false prophet, as well as all whose names are not found written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev. 20:10,15). It is a description of the fate of the

lost.

Some take this as a literal description, others as symbolic. In either case, it is a fearful and final reality which no one can fully describe.

*In the presence of the holy angels, and . . . the Lamb.*—This may seem a contradiction to the statement of Jesus that the lost will be separated from Him (Matt. 7:23). The point here seems to be that the sight of the Lamb, now triumphant and victorious, would be the most powerful factor in the pain of the wicked because, as worshipers of the beast, they had joined him in warfare against the Lamb.

### **BLESSINGS DECLARED FOR THE FAITHFUL (14:13)**

<sup>13</sup>**And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.**

**Verse 13.** How we live our lives on earth has eternal consequences.

*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*—This blessing seems to be a pronouncement primarily on those who are about to suffer martyrdom. However, this is a blessing enjoyed by all Christians. (1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Thess. 4:16). In this context, it refers probably to first-century martyrs or to those in the great tribulation.

*Rest from their labours . . . deeds follow.*—The word “labours” here refers to wearisome toil. Affliction and persecution by the beast have worn the saints down to the point of exhaustion. The believers’ faithful deeds “follow them” beyond death.

### **THE HARVEST OF THE EARTH (14:14-15)**

<sup>14</sup>**And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. <sup>15</sup>And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.**

The time of the end is close. This scene supposes that humanity has made up its mind: loyalty to Christ even unto martyrdom, or worship of the beast.

**Verse 14.** This is a symbol of Christ in His mission of ingathering the redeemed of the earth. The purpose of Christ’s coming again is to reap the harvest of the earth.

*The white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man.*

—White in the Revelation is always associated with the things of God. Here it may represent the divinity of Christ. The fact that the one in the vision is seated indicates that he is a judge with authority to hear and decide cases. “Son of man” was Jesus’ favorite term for Himself, and He used it many times in the Gospels. It speaks of His incarnation, God coming to earth in human form.

*Golden crown . . . sharp sickle.*—The golden crown is symbolic of triumph, and the sharp sickle is the instrument of harvesting, a symbol of the climactic judgments related to the second coming.

**Verse 15.** This is a vision of the returning Christ, introduced but not described in detail. This will be done in chapters 19 and 20.

*Another angel came . . . crying. . .*—The relationship between Christ and His angels is a mystery we cannot solve, but it is clear that the relationship is a close one. So there can be no objection that an angel is the agent of the Father in calling for the hour of harvest.

*Harvest of the earth is ripe.*—This expression is a frequent biblical symbol for the final judgment of men (Matt. 13:30). Some see this as an indication that both the wicked and the righteous will be harvested simultaneously. Others see this harvest of the grain as a special reference to the righteous only. In this view, the unrighteous would be the harvest of grapes (14:17-20).

The word “ripe” carries the idea that the time of the harvest has come and cannot be delayed. These words convey the idea that history is moving under the sovereignty of God.

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *Knowing our future is secure prepares us for present problems.*—In the midst of God’s great judgments of the earth the people of God are sealed by His Holy Spirit and are safe in their salvation.

2. *Obedience is one of the chief characteristics of a committed Christian.*—Followers of Jesus are challenged to deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow Him.

3. *The purpose of God’s judgments is not simply to crush humanity, but to give opportunity to repent.*—In the redemptive purpose of God, His wrath is necessary as well as His love and mercy. God is often called a consuming fire. The relationship one has to a fire determines whether it destroys him or saves him. If God’s mercy does not redeem, it condemns.

4. *God rewards his faithful followers.*—The ones who die in the Lord leave their life of weariness behind. However, the rewards of their works will follow them into eternity. Therefore, the time to rest from good works is not here on the earth, but when we get to heaven.

5. *History will not get out of control; in God's hour, the issues will be settled.*—History and human affairs are not ruled by a blind, meaningless fate which goes nowhere. God is watching over history, and the hour will come in His divine wisdom when humanity is ripe for judgment.



Foreign Mission Board

Laodicea, where one of the churches in Revelation was located.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to identify from John's vision the values of being faithful Christians and the disadvantages of being lost, and to accept Christ as their Savior and Lord

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) Collect the newspapers and/or news magazines called for in Step 1. (3) Prepare the strips with the verse portions called for in Step 2 (Kit item 15). (4) Prepare the sheets of paper called for in Step 7. (5) Prepare the word strips called for in Step 6. (6) Inasmuch as this is an evangelistic lesson, pray that the Holy Spirit will prepare some to respond to Christ as Savior and Lord.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains these helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 2e—"FOR NEXT WEEK" Assignment Slips; Item 15—Strips: Discover Spiritual Characteristics of the 144,000. Item 16—Word Strips: Revelation 14:14-15.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 14:1,3-4,6,8-10,13-15

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Bring several issues of your daily newspaper, along with several recent issues of a news magazine. Ask members, in groups of two or three, to search for articles they would call "good news" and several they would call "bad news." After several minutes ask each group to identify briefly one article in each category. Explain that the Bible is both good news and bad news. Invite members to find Revelation 14 to study both the good news of salvation and the bad news of God's judgment.

**2** *To identify spiritual characteristics of the 144,000:* Prepare a brief lecture on the various views of the identity of the 144,000 in 14:1,3-4. Refer to the "Focal Passage Study" as well as the "Perspective." Refer back to the study of 7:2-4 for additional information. Point out the most rewarding experience will not be in knowing their identity, but knowing and duplicating their spiritual characteristics.

Distribute six strips with the following phrases from 14:1,3-4 (Kit item 15): (1) "having his Father's name written in their foreheads," (2) "they sung as it were a new song," (3) "which were redeemed from the earth," (4) "which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins," (5) "which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," (6) "the firstfruits



unto God and the Lamb." Ask the person or group to find their verse in the Bible and to think of as many spiritual characteristics as they can which their phrase suggests. Allow about 2 minutes, then call for a report. Possible answers: (1) They are God's possession, his name showed ownership; they bore outward evidence of belonging to God; they were protected by God. (2) They had something to sing about; they experienced such newness of life they had to praise God; Christ has brought in a new era. (3) God had purchased them; God had saved them from earth's life-style and destiny. (4) They stayed true to God in purity and faithfulness; they refused allegiance to any rival god. (5) They were obedient to Christ; they were followers of Christ and available to him. (6) They were part of a spiritual harvest belonging to God and to Christ.

Attempt to show how each characteristic named is desirable and appropriate for Christians today.

**3** *To understand the everlasting gospel:* Write on the board: "good news" and "bad news." Point out that when preachers preach the gospel in its fullness, they must proclaim judgment, as well as salvation. Point out that the word gospel means "good news" but that it also may contain bad news for those who refuse it. Ask someone to read 14:6-7. Ask: what is the good news of the eternal gospel? the bad news? (God's purpose is about to be fulfilled. That's good *and* bad news.)

**4** *To understand the future wrath of God:* Draw a circle around the words "bad news." Ask a volunteer to read 14:8, then another to read 14:9-10. Ask the others to listen for what they would consider the most fearful aspect of God's wrath. (Possible answers: it will be undiluted or at full strength in its final outpouring, it will involve torment with fire and brimstone, it will be experienced in the presence of Christ and the angels.) Invite several to tell which aspect of God's future wrath would lead them to be saved, if they were still lost. Now draw a circle around the words "good news." Ask members to suggest what would have the greatest appeal to them to become Christians, if they had never yet made a decision.

**5** *To think about the blessedness of those who die in the Lord:* Read 14:13. Ask, According to this verse what makes persons blessed or happy when they die? (die in the Lord) What two factors are mentioned that make dying in the Lord a blessing? (rest from labors and reward for works)

**6** *To understand the meaning of the harvesting of the earth:* Ask members to read silently 14:14-15. As they read, distribute the following word strips (Kit item 16) to the members: white cloud, Son of man, golden crown, sharp sickle, a ripe harvest. Use the "Focal Passage Study" and *Bible Book Study Commentary* to develop a lecture explaining these verses. As you discuss each phrase ask the person with the word strip to place it on the wall.

**7** *To identify some values of being faithful Christians and some disadvantages of being lost:* Distribute a small piece of paper to all members. Ask them to reflect over the things talked about during this session and write some truths they count of greatest value in a person's being a faithful Christian. After a couple of minutes, ask them to use the other side to list some disadvantages of being lost. Call for several to read aloud their lists.

**8** *To encourage the lost to accept Christ as Savior and Lord:* Suggest that, in light of the disadvantages of being lost, it is urgent for everyone to repent of sin. In light of the values of being a Christian, it is urgent to receive Christ by faith. Lead members in a prayer which any who are not Christians could pray silently after you in order to express to God their willingness to repent of sin and receive Christ as Savior. Pause after each sentence to allow time for persons to pray after you. (You might include in your prayer such words as: "Dear Lord, I confess that I have sinned and need your forgiveness. I know that you love me and that Christ died for my sin. Today I want to turn from my sin and trust Christ as my Savior and Lord. I am willing to obey and follow Christ from this day forward.") When you have concluded your prayer, ask any who prayed to accept Christ to share that fact with you. Offer to go with such persons for an appointment with your pastor or to accompany them in making their decisions public in the worship service.

If someone does accept Christ as a result of this lesson, would you please let us know? We want to rejoice with you and pray for the person. Please write: Jim Taulman, MSN 175, 127 Ninth Ave. North, Nashville, TN 37234.

**FOR NEXT WEEK:** Assign (Kit item 2e) a member to prepare a two-minute report on Megiddo and share it with the class next Sunday.

# Seven Vials of God's Judgment

**Background Passage:** Revelation 15:1 to 16:21

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 15:5-7; 16:4-6,10-17

**Central Truth:** God's righteous judgment on those who make themselves His enemies by their enormous sins illustrates the certainty of judgment on those who refuse to repent.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. Those Who Conquered Sing Praises in Heaven (15:1-4)
2. Seven Angels With Vials Come From Heaven's Temple (15:5 to 16:1)
3. First Vial: Evil Sores on Evil Persons (16:2)
4. Second Vial: Sea Becomes Like Blood (16:3)
5. Third Vial: Rivers and Fountains Become Blood (16:4-7)
6. Fourth Vial: The Sun's Heat Scorches (16:8-9)
7. Fifth Vial: The Beast's Kingdom Darkened (16:10-11)
8. Sixth Vial: The Euphrates Dried for Kings to Cross (16:12-16)
9. Seventh Vial: Poured Into the Air (16:17-21)

John saw another mighty sign in heaven showing things to come (15:1). Seven angels were assigned to carry down to the earth the seven last plagues which will complete God's wrath.

*Those who conquered sing praises in heaven (15:1-4).*—John saw what appeared to be a sea of glass and fire, and on it stood all those who had been victorious over the beast, his statue, and his mark. They were singing the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb. Their song praised God for His great and marvelous deeds and His holiness which had not been revealed.

*Seven angels with vials come from heaven's temple (15:5 to 16:1).*—The temple of the heavenly tabernacle was opened wide. The seven angels who had been assigned to pour out the seven last plagues came from the temple to receive the golden vials full of the wrath of God. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory and power of God, and no one could enter until the seven plagues were ended. A mighty voice from the temple told the seven angels to go and pour on the earth the seven vials of God's

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Temple of tabernacle of testimony (15:5)	Symbolic of God's dwelling place		Reminds us that the judgments are connected not with church age but with God carrying out His covenant with Israel
Time of vial judgments (15:7 to 16:21)	Immediate application to Roman Empire; continuous application throughout history, and end-time application	End of tribulation period; constitutes third woe/seventh trumpet	Last half of great tribulation period
First vial (16:2)	Judgment on adherents of false religion, including Domitian worshipers	Inflicted specifically on followers of Antichrist	Spiritual plague as great an annoyance as physical suffering
Second vial (16:3)	Destruction of sources of physical sustenance	Death of everything in sea	Death and desolation, whether literal or symbolic
Third vial (16:4-7)	Those who shed blood of saints will receive a curse of blood	Affects fresh water	Destroys the sources of life
Fourth vial (16:8-9)	Even when people recognize that source of all life fights against them for God, they blaspheme and refuse to repent	God overrules processes of nature to bring judgment, but people still refuse to repent	The primary source of mankind's comfort becomes a curse instead
Fifth vial (16:10-11)	God's judgment on seat of beast's authority; darkness indicates confused and evil plotting	Directed against the demonic civilization of end time	Great federation of nations of new Rome is attacked at its center; darkness brought about by demonical delusions; symbolic
Sixth vial (16:12-16)	Forces against God will ultimately be destroyed; here refers specifically to Parthians, whom Rome feared	Serves as preparation for great battle of end-time; a coalition of demonically-inspired human rulers	Refers to great world conflict of many nations at Armageddon in Palestine

Seventh vial (16:17-21)	Poured in the air all must breathe; strikes note of final judg- ment on Roman Empire	Describes fall of end- time Babylon (dealt with more fully later)	Utter destruction of every spiritual and religious institution mankind has built without God; the absolute overthrow of civilization
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wrath.

*First vial: evil sores on evil persons (16:2).*—The first angel poured out his vial on the earth, and horrible sores broke out on everyone who had the mark of the beast and was worshiping his statue.

*Second vial: sea becomes like blood (16:3).*—The second angel poured out his vial into the sea and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

*Third vial: rivers and fountains become blood (16:4-7).*—The third angel poured his vial into the rivers and springs and they became blood. John heard the angel of the water say that God was just in sending this judgment because the saints and prophets had been martyred and their blood poured onto the earth. Those who murdered them deserved this plague. A voice from the altar also affirmed God's righteous judgment.

*Fourth vial: The sun's heat scorches (16:8-9).*—The fourth angel poured his vial on the sun, causing it to scorch people with its fire. Everyone affected by the intense heat cursed the name of God who sent the plagues. Still, they would not repent of their evil ways.

*Fifth vial: the beast's kingdom darkened (16:10-11).*—The fifth angel poured his vial on the throne of the beast and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. All his followers gnawed their tongues for the torment. They cursed God for their severe pain and sores and would not repent.

*Sixth vial: the Euphrates dried for kings to cross (16:12-16).*—The sixth angel poured his vial on the river Euphrates and it dried up to make a way for the coming of the kings of the east. John saw three foul spirits like frogs coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They were demonic spirits, performing signs and conferring with the kings of the world to assemble them for war on the great day of God. They gathered at the place which in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

*Seventh vial: poured into the air (16:17-21).*—The seventh angel poured his vial into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple in heaven saying, "It is done." There were flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake unlike any in human history. The great city of Babylon split into three parts and cities around the world fell. God



remembered Babylon's sins and she was punished to the last drop of wine in the cup of God's great wrath. The people of the world cursed God because of His wrath.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### SEVEN ANGELS WITH VIALS COME FROM HEAVEN'S TEMPLE (15:5-7)

**<sup>5</sup>And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: <sup>6</sup>And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. <sup>7</sup>And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.**

Chapters 12—14 recorded an interlude between the sounding of the seven trumpets and the outpouring of the seven bowls or vials. Chapters 15 and 16 record the seven vials of God's judgment.

**Verse 5.** The temple has already appeared in the Revelation (11:19) as a reminder of God's faithfulness to His covenant promises.

*The temple of the tabernacle of the testimony of heaven.*—This verse may combine two historical references: the tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple which was constructed later in Jerusalem. The tabernacle became the pattern for the Temple, which was used as a symbol of the dwelling of God in heaven. Some understand this passage to refer to the very presence of God. Others see it as a reference to Israel's experience in the tribulation period.

**Verse 6.** The faithfulness of God demands the judgment of evil.

*Seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues.*—The final seven plagues are described as occurring as the result of the emptying of seven vials received by angels who come from the very presence of God. The angels serve as God's agents to fulfill His covenant promise to bless His people and judge their enemies. The use of the number seven is a symbol of God's final, full judgment.

*Clothed in pure and white linen . . . golden girdles.*—The clothing of these angels is designed to enhance their splendor. It represents the purity from which the wrath of God is poured out. Here we see righteousness in action. The angels are pouring out God's righteousness on the earth to bring glory to God.

**Verse 7.** God's judgment will be full and complete.

*One of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God.*—That one of the living creatures gave the seven

angels the seven vials may be a symbolic way of saying that all of the created beings were in accord with God's wrath. A vial was a shallow bowl used for drinking. The extent of God's wrath is indicated by the word "full."

*Who liveth for ever and ever.*—This is an emphasis on the eternity of God. It is a reminder that, although evil may seem to dominate affairs in human history, God is the eternal One whose purpose cannot be frustrated by satanic and demonic evil. (See "Perspectives.")

### **THIRD VIAL: RIVERS AND FOUNTAINS BECOME BLOOD (16:4-6)**

**<sup>4</sup>And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. <sup>5</sup>And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. <sup>6</sup>For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.**

The plagues are God's answer to Satan's last and greatest effort to frustrate the divine rule. The plagues must be seen in the context of the titanic struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan pictured so vividly in chapter 12.

**Verse 4.** There are certain similarities to the plagues of Egypt. But the seven vial plagues are much more severe and intense.

*Third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters.*—This plague is similar to the third trumpet in which a third of humanity was affected (8:10). Here there is no such limitation. Everyone is affected. It seems there will be great suffering and death. Some understand the rivers and fountains to represent the sources of life for society. These very sources are turned into instruments of judgment. The spilling of blood is a symbol of death. Society dies as a result of sin, decay and corruption.

Some interpret the judgments of the vials as symbolic of God's judgments on all the ages. Others understand these judgments to be God's final judgments during the end time. (See "Perspectives.")

**Verses 5-6.** Because of God's holy character He is justified in all His judgments.

*The angel of the waters.*—This expression is found nowhere else in Scripture. The voice of this angel proclaims the justice of God's judgments on those who have shed the blood of those who were loyal to God.

The judgment of those who have martyred the saints is suited to the evil they have done. This is what they deserve.

#### **FIFTH VIAL: THE BEAST'S KINGDOM DARKENED (16:10-11)**

<sup>10</sup>And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, <sup>11</sup>And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

Even grievous pain does not awaken the world to the reality of the seriousness of rejecting God.

**Verse 10.** The fifth angel's vial shows God's direct attack on the very control center of the beast's dominion.

*The seat of the beast.*—This plague is poured out directly on the beast's power. The seat is the throne of the beast. Some understand that this does not represent God's wrath against the sins of men in general, but His wrath poured out on the demonic civilization of the last time. Others understand this to be a symbolic picture of God's judgment of the power of Satan over all the ages.

*His kingdom was full of darkness.*—Darkness is often used to symbolize distress, confusion, lack of direction, and purpose. This darkness was accompanied by acute anguish. The cause of the distress and pain led people to "gnaw their tongues" in agony. Some suppose that the intense darkness served to magnify the pain inflicted by the preceding plagues, which already had brought "pains" and "sores" (v. 11).

**Verse 11.** Instead of the worshipers of the beast repenting because of the righteous judgments of God, they become more set against God.

*Repented not of their deeds.*—Again, people recognize the hand of God at work but their hearts are hardened. They refuse to show any trace of repentance but instead "blasphemed the God of heaven." They attribute their pain to God instead of their own sins.

#### **SIXTH VIAL: THE EUPHRATES DRIED FOR KINGS TO CROSS (16:12-16)**

<sup>12</sup>And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. <sup>13</sup>And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. <sup>14</sup>For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God

Almighty. <sup>15</sup>Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. <sup>16</sup>And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

This vial is different from the first five in that it does not inflict a plague but serves as a preparation for a battle.

**Verse 12.** This plague is similar to the sixth trumpet, when four angels were released from beyond the Euphrates to lead an invasion by a large host of demonic cavalry which killed a third of humanity (9:13-18).

*The great river Euphrates . . . dried up.*—The river Euphrates in the Old Testament was the boundary of the Promised Land, beyond which were hostile nations waiting for the opportunity to invade the people of God. Some understand this to refer to a potential threat to the Roman Empire by the Parthians and a symbolic future defeat of all of God's enemies. Some see the drying of the river as representing symbolically the removal of a barrier which holds back the unbelieving world as it unites against God. This is seen as preparation for a great end-time battle. Others understand this to represent a literal battle near the end time between Oriental kingdoms and the Turks allied with others, throwing the whole world into a bloody conflict.

*The way of the kings from the east.*—These kings are not defined or their role described. Some see this as a conflict between the kings of the east and the kings of the whole world (v. 14). Others understand the kings to be the kings or leaders of the whole world. In any case, John expects a confederation of groups of kings that will be involved in the battle between the beast and the Lamb.

**Verse 13.** For the first time, the term "the false prophet" occurs. He is the second beast who arose out of the earth. He supports the first beast in his blasphemous claims (13:11-12).

*Three unclean spirits like frogs.*—This describes the demonic inspiration of the foes of God in the great battle. The frogs may be an allusion to the plague of frogs in Egypt before the Exodus.

This does not seem to be a mere military or political movement but the climactic manifestation in future history of the age-long struggle between God and Satan. The fact that the foul spirits came out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet may indicate a reference to false teaching. This may represent their message and influence.

**Verse 14.** The three foul spirits have one task to perform, that of gathering all humanity together for the final battle against God.

*For they are the spirits of devils.*—They are demonic spirits. (For “the kings of the earth,” see the discussion on v. 12.) John expected a coalition of human rulers, demonically inspired, who will do battle with God.

*The battle of that great day of God Almighty.*—This is an unusual biblical phrase. The more common phrases are “the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2), “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10), or “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8). Peter wrote of “the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:12). Jesus used the phrase “the last day” (John 6:39). Some see a difference in the meanings of these terms. Others understand them to refer to the same time or event.

John saw the hatred that has expressed itself throughout the ages of human history in terms of hostility and persecution of the people of God as coming to a grand finale when rulers of the earth join hands in battle against God.

**Verse 15.** The coming of Christ again is associated with the end and the great battle of the day of God Almighty.

*I come as a thief.*—This emphasis is on the unexpectedness of the Lord’s return, and in light of the uncertainty of the times, believers must never become lax, but must always be awake.

*Watcheth, and keepeth his garments.*—This is a warning against spiritual nakedness and poverty and a summons to spiritual diligence. “Watch” means to “be awake,” rather than to visually see.

**Verse 16.** John describes the decisive struggle between the forces of good and evil.

*A place called . . . Armageddon.*—The three unclean spirits gather the kings of the world to battle in a place called Armageddon. Some understand this to be the literal plain located between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, the valley of Jezreel (Esdraelon). It was a famous battleground in the history of Israel. Megiddo is a mound at the entrance of the valley where many civilizations have constructed a fortress to guard the valley. Others see this as a symbol of the decisive struggle between the powers of evil and the kingdom of God.

## **SEVENTH VIAL: POURED INTO THE AIR (16:17)**

**<sup>17</sup>And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.**

The voice from heaven announced the decisive judgment of God on the beast’s capital as though it had already happened.

*It is done.*—This is one word in Greek, indicating completed action.



John had used this literary technique before, announcing an event as though it had already taken place, and later expounding the fuller content of that fact. John has already announced the fall of Babylon (14:8), and here seems to anticipate that fall, yet does not give the details of that judgment until the next two chapters (17—18). John has frequently introduced the end and then later enlarged on the events which will occur at the end (compare 6:12; 11:15; 14:8,14; 15:2).

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *In the darkest hours when it seems evil has won, God's people can sing a song of deliverance.*—However strong the forces of evil may appear; and however hopeless the position of God's people appears, God will give the victory.

2. *Rejection of Christ causes unbelievers to have confusion and misunderstanding about the meaning of life.*—The darkness of life is the result of turning away from the light of truth.

3. *The purpose of God's judgments are never to cause pain but to produce repentance.*—God's judgments on the world are without spite, bitterness, and hatred. Despite life's problems, most do not repent. Sinners often react in the wrong way and blaspheme God instead of humbling-themselves before God.

4. *Christians should invest their time, talents, and energy, not in worldly, temporal things, but in the abiding things of God's redemptive purpose.*—How? Invest in things going to heaven—men, women, boys, and girls; not in stocks, bonds, oil, land, cattle, or any commerce.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to explain the significance of the seven vials and the refusal of the people to repent, and to identify tasks or positions in their church through which they can work to lead the lost to Christ

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1) and the map of Revelation (Kit item 3). (3) Locate a picture of Megiddo (Kit item 17); (3) Enlist a member (Kit item 2e) to prepare a two-minute report on Megiddo.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains these helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 2e—"FOR NEXT WEEK" Assignment Slips; Item 3—Map: First-Century Roman World; Item 17—Picture: Megiddo.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 15:5-7; 16:4-6,10-17

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Share the following illustration: On one occasion a young boy picked a watermelon from the field even though his father had forbidden him. After he had eaten the melon, he buried the rinds and seeds. Later, his father noticed a lot of small sprouts coming up. He dug into the ground and discovered the rinds and sprouting watermelon seeds. A confrontation with his son soon followed.

Our sin has a way of being discovered by God. We cannot escape the judgment that follows.

**2** *To see the certainty and completeness of judgment on sin as expressed through seven vials:* Relate this lesson to the visions of the trumpets by referring to the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). Explain that the three previous chapters were an interlude between the trumpets and vials.

Write on the board, "the certainty of judgment." Point out that 15:5-7 refers to seven angels, four beasts, and the eternal God. Ask members which of these three guarantees judgment on sin. (the eternal God who is capable of expressing wrath) Relate "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven" to God's dwelling place. Point out that the seven angels with vials of judgment come from the presence of God.

Write a second phrase on the board, "the completeness of judgment." Ask members to scan 15:5-7 for expressions that speak of completeness. (The "seven" angels and "full" vials and both suggest completeness.)

Ask them how thoroughly the contents of the vials express God's judgment in chapter 16.

**3** *To examine the effects of the judgment of the third vial:* Ask someone to read aloud 16:4-6. Refer the class to Exodus 7 to find a plague similar to this one in Revelation. (Ex. 7:19-21) Now refer them to Revelation 8 to recall a trumpet plague that affected the rivers and fountains like this vial judgment. (Rev. 8:10-11) Point out that the third vial judgment is more complete in that more than one-third of humanity was affected. Ask for the significance of this judgment on the fresh waters of the earth. (See various explanations in the "Focal Passage Study" on these verses, as well as in the "Perspectives.")

**4** *To show the depth of human rebelliousness that refuses to repent even in the face of God's judgment:* Ask someone to read aloud 16:10-11, while the others listen for the reaction to this vial. (They "blasphemed" God and "repented not.")

Write on the board: "the seat of the beast" and "his kingdom was full of darkness." Underline the words "seat" and "darkness." Explain the opinions about the meaning of the first phrase. (See "Focal Passage Study" on v. 10.) Call for members to suggest meanings of the darkness. (Possible answers: ignorance, evil, moral darkness)

Ask: Why would people refuse to repent in light of such judgment? Why do people today refuse to repent? Urge members not to let their rebellion develop past a point of no return.

**5** *To understand the demonic relentlessness of God's enemies in fighting against Him:* Locate the Euphrates River on a map (Kit item 3). Point out how invading kings from the east would need to cross it if they were literally to enter Palestine.

Locate the valley of Jezreel and the fortress mound of Megiddo on a map (Kit item 3). Display the picture of the valley of Jezreel (Kit item 17). If you made the assignment (Kit item 2e), call for a report.

Ask members to form two groups. Ask the first group to explain how the passage applied to John's day and the Roman Empire. Ask the second group to explain how the passage would apply to the future end-time events. Refer both groups to the "Perspectives," as well as the "Focal Passage Study" in their quarterlies. If possible, make available the "Focal Passage Study" in this quarterly and *Bible Book Study Commentary*. Allow 6 or 7 minutes, then call for a report.

Focus on the "three unclean spirits" (16:13-14), to emphasize the

demonic nature of this opposition to God and the source of the "battle of that great day." Point out that the opposition's defeat will be studied in 19:11-21 but that the victory is anticipated by the cry of 16:17.

**6** *To see the value of Christians watching for the Lord's return:* Direct attention to 16:15. Introduce it as one of the "beatitudes" of Revelation, then read it aloud. Ask: According to this verse, what attitude should believers have about the return of the Lord? What differences do such attitudes make in the way believers should live?

**7** *To discuss how members can work through the church to lead the lost to Christ:* Ask members to name organizations and church programs that seek to win the lost. Write these on the board as they are suggested. (Sunday School is one.) Ask what ideas to reach the lost they would like to see put into action.

Conclude by observing that since all members are already part of this particular class, a practical question is, What can individual members do to lead the lost to Christ? Challenge members to act on at least one of the suggestions named.

*Bible Book Study Guide:* If your members use *Bible Book Study Guide* suggest they take the posttest over Revelation 12:1 to 16:21 and the pretest over Revelation 17:1 to 22:21.

# FINAL TRIUMPH AND THE NEW JERUSALEM

REVELATION 17:1 to 22:21

## 4 UNIT

September 6

## The Fall of Babylon

**Background Passage:** Revelation 17:1 to 18:24

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 17:6-13; 18:2-5

**Central Truth:** The promised fall of Babylon in spite of its wealth, power, and vast support of kings and merchants challenges Christians to withdraw from their involvement in sinful practices and to be faithful to Christ.

### BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. The Harlot Babylon Described (17:1-6)
2. The Mystery of the Woman Explained (17:7-14)
3. The Woman's Coming Destruction Explained (17:15-18)
4. An Angel Announces Babylon's Fall (18:1-3)
5. A Call for God's People to Leave Cursed Babylon (18:4-8)
6. Kings and Merchants Mourn for Babylon (18:9-19)
7. Babylon to Sink Like a Millstone (18:20-24)

*The harlot Babylon described (17:1-6).*—An angel took John in spirit (possibly in the power of the Holy Spirit) into a wilderness and showed him a woman dressed in purple and scarlet and beautiful jewelry. She held in her hand a golden cup full of obscenities. On her forehead was written a name: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth."

She sat on "many waters" and at the same time sat on a scarlet beast which had seven heads and ten horns. The leaders of the world had had



## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Babylon (woman—17:5)	Historical Rome	Capital city of future Antichrist	Apostate church of the future
Persecution of 17:6	Roman Empire's persecution of Christians for refusal to worship emperor	Will take place in end-time Babylon	Persecution and martyrdom of the saints
Beast	Domitian	Antichrist	Head of satanic federation of nations of revived Roman Empire; linked with apostate church (seventh head)
Seven mountains (17:9)	Pagan Rome, which was built on seven hills	Indicate power, so here means a succession of empires, last of which is end-time Babylon	Rome, revived at end-time
Seven heads (17:7) and seven kings (17:10)	Roman emperors from Augustus to Titus, excluding three brief rules	Five past godless kingdoms; sixth was Rome; seventh would arise in end-time	Five distinct forms of Roman government prior to John; sixth was imperial Rome; seventh will be revived Roman Empire
Ten horns (17:7) and ten kings (17:12)	Vassal kings who ruled with Rome's permission	Symbolic of earthly powers that will be subservient to Antichrist	Ten kingdoms arising in future out of revived Roman Empire
Waters (17:15)	People ruled by Roman Empire	Indicates complex civilization	People dominated by apostate church
Kings rebel against whore (17:16-17)	Vassal kings' rebellion	Chaos attending end-time when Babylon's judgment is near	Ten kings turn on apostate church (whore)
Call to come out (18:4)	Directed to Christians not to engage in emperor worship and other idolatries	Directed to God's people; indicates that some will survive the great tribulation	Directed to redeemed within present and future apostate religious systems

immoral relations with her, and the people of the earth had been made drunk by the wine of her immorality. She was drunk with the blood of

the martyrs she had killed. John was shown what was going to happen to the great harlot.

*The mystery of the woman explained (17:7-14).*—John was astonished by what he saw. The angel then explained the mystery of the woman and the beast she was riding. He was alive but died. And yet, he will come out of the bottomless pit, then go to eternal destruction. He and his helpers will wage war with the Lamb and will be defeated by Him.

*The woman's coming destruction explained (17:15-18).*—The "waters" on which the harlot sat were a symbol of the masses of people of every race and nation. Strangely, the ten horns (kings) on the beast will come to hate the woman, and will attack her and leave her naked and ravaged by fire. God would work in these events to carry out His purpose.

*An angel announces Babylon's fall (18:1-3).*—Another angel came down from heaven with great authority. He lit up the earth with his splendor. With a mighty voice he proclaimed that "Babylon the great is fallen." She had become a den of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit. All the nations had drunk deep of the fierce wine of her immorality. The rulers of earth had been immoral with her. Businessmen the world over had grown rich on her wealth.

*A call for God's people to leave cursed Babylon (18:4-8).*—Another voice from heaven called for the people of God to leave the city and not take part in her sins. God judged her for her many sins, piled as high as heaven. She mixed many a cup of woe for others. She lived in luxury and pleasure. She boasted that she was a queen on a throne, not a helpless widow. She did not think she could ever experience sorrow or failure. But death and mourning and famine shall overtake her in a single day, for the Lord God had pronounced her doom.

*Kings and merchants mourn for Babylon (18:9-19).*—The leaders and the merchants of the world wept over her failure. They could not believe that in a moment all the wealth of the city was gone.

*Babylon to sink like a millstone (18:20-24).*—God had at last judged the wicked city which controlled the world. She shall be thrown into the sea like a huge millstone and disappear forever. She, who was responsible for the blood of all the martyred prophets and the saints, shall herself experience death.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### THE HARLOT BABYLON DESCRIBED (17:6)

**<sup>6</sup>And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.**

John's narrative is now hastening to its end. All that remains now is to tell of the coming of the end.

**Verse 6.** Twice before, John briefly referred to the fall of "Babylon" (14:8; 16:19). Now he picked up this symbol to develop it at length as one of the most important facts in the coming of the end.

*The woman.*—These are details of the judgment of Babylon symbolically described as a harlot (vv. 1-2). She is the symbol of human civilization with all its pomp and circumstance organized in opposition to God. She had been described as seated on "many waters" (v. 1) and on a "scarlet . . . beast" (v. 3). The fluid picture language of the Revelation allows a mixture of these scenes. That she was seated on many waters reflects her relationship to the nations of earth (v. 15); that she was seated on the scarlet beast reflects her relationship to the beast out of the sea (13:1).

Some understand that the end-time Babylon will be the capital city of the godless nations of the earth. John used the symbolism of the Old Testament city of Babylon to represent the final manifestation of the total history of godless nations. Others interpret Babylon and the woman in chapter 17 as symbolic of the apostate church of the future, which will be most noted for the persecution and martyrdom of the saints. Nothing as far reaching as this in scope had yet befallen the Christian church. John looked for a day when the chief city of the beast will be infamous for her persecution of the saints, primarily on religious grounds. Still others understand the woman to be a symbol of all the godless nations which have existed down through the ages, here primarily focusing on first-century Rome. (See "Perspectives.")

*Drunken with the blood.*—This is a common ancient symbol. Some make a distinction between "the blood of the saints" and "the blood of the martyrs." However, "saints" and "martyrs" probably describe the same persons. They are saints because they belong to God and martyrs because they have shed their blood. Furthermore, they are martyrs of Jesus because of their unswerving faith in Him and their refusal to deny His name. Because some interpret the harlot as referring only to the end-time civilization, they understand these saints and martyrs to be of the great tribulation period.

*I wondered with great admiration.*—"Admiration" here would more clearly be translated "amazement." John was not yet sure of the significance of the vision.

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE WOMAN EXPLAINED (17:7-13)**

**7** And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell

thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. <sup>8</sup>The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. <sup>9</sup>And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. <sup>10</sup>And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. <sup>11</sup>And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eight, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. <sup>12</sup>And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. <sup>13</sup>These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

**Verse 7.** The angel's response to John's amazement (v. 6b) does not stop with an explanation of the mystery of the great harlot, but also explains the mystery of the beast. This shows the inseparable relationship between the woman and the beast. John was also shown the meaning of the seven heads and the ten horns of the beast. All of this is "the mystery" explained to John.

*The mystery of the woman.*—In the New Testament, the word "mystery" refers to truth that can be known only by revelation. It is not merely the mysterious, but that which can be known only by divine revelation only to those who are illumined by the Spirit. In the ordinary sense, a mystery implies knowledge withheld; in Scripture it is truth revealed (Col. 1:26). On the description of the beast, see comments on 13:1 in August 16 lesson.

**Verse 8.** John was now given further explanation of the meaning of the beast.

*The beast . . . was and is not . . . shall ascend . . . go into perdition.*—John already had been shown the beast and told that one of its heads had had a mortal wound, but the mortal wound was healed (13:3). Now he was told that the beast is to pass through three stages: it had an existence in the past; there will be a time when it does not exist; and it will have a future manifestation which will be an incarnation of satanic evil. Some understand this to indicate that the beast is not one person or even one period of history, but rather world power as it exists throughout all ages. World power always has a manifestation of opposition to God.

The three stages of the existence of the beast can be related to his seven heads (13:1,3). He once existed in one or more of his heads; he ceased to exist when one of the heads received a mortal wound; but he will have a future existence when the head is healed. The healing of the head will involve a satanic embodiment that will exceed anything that has yet occurred. However, this final manifestation of the beast will be short-lived; it is destined to go to perdition. "Perdition" is a word occasionally used of the final state of eternal doom.

*Shall ascend out of the bottomless pit.*—The bottomless pit is the home of Satan and demons and indicates that the power of the political empire ("the beast") is satanic in its origin.

*They that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life.*—John identified those who marvel at the beast by two descriptions that both indicate that the people are unsaved. The cause of their wonder may be the impressiveness of the beast's power.

**Verse 9.** The angel was about to explain the mystery of the woman and the beast (v. 7), but it is not a self-evident explanation; it is one that only those spiritually enlightened will understand.

*The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*—Some interpreters see this description as first-century Rome because Rome was widely known as the city built on seven hills. Others understand the mountains or hills as a symbol of power or rule. The seven mountains are thought to stand for seven empires and their rulers at different stages in a godless world system throughout the ages. Others understand the seven mountains to represent a revived Roman Empire of the end-time. (See "Perspectives.")

**Verse 10.** An angel explained that the seven heads represented seven kings or kingdoms (vv. 9-10).

*There are seven kings.*—Some interpret this verse to refer to the succession of Roman emperors. Five had reigned; the sixth was ruling during the time of John; and a seventh and last emperor was to follow.

Others point out the difficulties of designating these kings as individual emperors. They interpret them as kingdoms. Several interpreters point out that the word "fallen" is much better applied to the fall of a kingdom than to the death of an emperor. Before imperial Rome there had been five forms of Roman government. Imperial Rome was the sixth kingdom. The seventh kingdom would arise in the end-time but would endure only a comparatively short time. It would be the Roman Empire revived.

Some understand that these kingdoms were not limited to geographical or political boundaries. Rome was the sixth kingdom and the seventh



kingdom would arise in the end-time. (See "Perspectives.")

**Verse 11.** John added a new fact about the beast. It is an eighth head, yet it belongs to the seven heads. This suggests that one of the seven is to experience two stages of his existence. This may be why John said the seventh king will remain only a little while (v. 10). He will be shortly followed by an eighth, who is the seventh in his full antichristian manifestation. The eighth is like the seven, but yet is different from them. It belongs to the seven in that it succeeds them in world domination; but it stands apart in that it ascends from the abyss as the full satanic embodiment of the beast (the Antichrist).

Some understand the beast to be past, present, and future. The harlot, Babylon, represents the world as the center of Antichrist movement at any moment of history. All of the kingdoms of the world in which the beast has been embodied have perished. Yet this beast seems to have the ability to raise its head anew after every defeat. Humanity marvels at this and will especially be impressed with the final manifestation of the power of the beast, the antichristian world empire, just before the coming of Christ (v. 8b).

**Verse 12.** John indicated that the fullness of world power in opposition to Christ has not been reached. He points to a coming power hostile to God and His people.

*Ten kings.*—Some understand these kings as the kingdoms of a revived Roman empire. It is thought by this view that these kings or kingdoms will exist simultaneously at the end-time. Others understand these ten kings to be symbolic of the totality of the powers of all nations on the earth which are to be made subservient to Antichrist.

Still others interpret these kings as symbolic of vassal kings who ruled under Roman authority. Herod the Great would be an example of this kind of ruler. (See "Perspectives.")

**Verse 13.** John expressly says that these kings have not yet received power. They will receive their power when the beast appears. This has led many to interpret their time of existence as the future end-time.

*These have one mind.*—In a strange way, those who may have had different philosophies of life, now join together as allies of the beast with a singleness of purpose, the defeat of Christ. They receive their power to rule from the beast (Antichrist). Their sphere of power is brief. They are said to give their power and strength to the beast. They are further described as making war with the Lamb. Their defeat comes at the second coming by the Lord of lords (v. 14).

#### **AN ANGEL ANNOUNCES BABYLON'S FALL (18:2-3)**

<sup>2</sup>And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great

is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. <sup>3</sup>For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

**Verse 2.** After foretelling the destruction of Babylon by the beast and the ten kings or kingdoms who strangely turn on this once-proud and rich city (17:16), John described her judgment and destruction.

*Babylon the great is fallen.*—An angel of great splendor and power announced that Babylon had fallen. The fall had been announced previously (14:8). Some interpret this Babylon as the end-time world capital.

Babylon, the harlot, the worldly capital, sought to allure, tempt, seduce, and draw people away from God. She is portrayed as a pleasure-mad, arrogant, presumptuous city like the Babylon of old. But, her power now comes to an end. She will no longer be the mistress of civilization, no longer inhabited by princes and merchants. She has become so desolated that no human being will set foot in her. This devastation of end-time Babylon echoes language from Old Testament prophecies of the ruin of ancient Babylon, Edom, and Nineveh.

Others understand this Babylon to embody all successive world empires. Babylon takes her place throughout history; that is, there has always been a control center, empowered by Satan, to exert influence over the world. The fall of the last great Babylon coincides with the coming of our Lord for judgment.

**Verse 3.** The great harlot has used promises of power and enticements of wealth and luxury as the attraction for following her.

*All nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*—This tells of the means Babylon used to entice the world leaders to worship and follow the beast. Power and wealth were employed in the name of demonic religion. This evil attracted and affected particularly the political and the economic leaders of the world.

## **A CALL FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO LEAVE CURSED BABYLON (18:4-5)**

<sup>4</sup>And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. <sup>5</sup>For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

**Verse 4.** God will have a people dwelling in the city who have been under constant danger of death because of their loyalty to Jesus. Under the threat of martyrdom there will be constant pressure that people succumb and take part in her sins.

*Come out of her, my people.*—The people of God are challenged to flee the city lest they share in her sinfulness and her judgment. A similar summons was issued by the prophet Jeremiah to the Jews in ancient Babylon (Jer. 51:6).

Some understand this to be the time of great tribulation as described by Jesus (Matt. 24:21). Some view the people as believing Jews of the great tribulation. Others see these people as the church. John had already been shown the determination of the beast to destroy all who would not turn from their faith in Jesus to give their allegiance to him (13:7-8).

Others see Babylon not only as the city of the end-time, but as the world, as the center of seduction, in any age. Still others relate these words to the situation of the Roman Empire in the first century. (See "Perspectives.")

**Verse 5.** Babylon's sins are likened to a vast pile which reaches up to heaven.

*For her sins have reached unto heaven.*—The fact that her sins have been stacked one on another as bricks in a building may be an allusion to the tower of Babel which began the wicked career of ancient Babylon. Though God permits the sins, their divine judgment is inescapable. Babylon's doom is sure!

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *In every generation, Christians must identify and resist the presence of "the harlot."*—She represents the attractiveness of a world system that is against the way of God. Her allurements are to infatuate us with the pleasures and treasures of the world.

2. *Christians should not be surprised that the world does not love them.*—The unbelieving world has one united thing in common: a hatred for the church of Jesus Christ.

3. *As followers of Jesus, we must arm ourselves for spiritual battles.*—We are at war: we must not, through compromise, be guilty of aiding the enemy. There is no neutral area, no demilitarized zone. Every heart is a battlefield, and no person can remain uninvolved or unaffected.

4. *Although the power of evil has been allowed to exist, it will be brought to an end by the power of God.*—Because of widespread evil in the world, Christians sometimes are tempted to feel that Satan is more powerful than God. However, God in His sovereign rule has already defeated the

power of evil through the cross of Jesus Christ. John testified, "Greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world," (1 John 4:4).

5. *Those who become infatuated with the pleasures of the world will harden themselves against God.*—Those who set their heart on the world shall experience the bitter disappointments of sin's effects. God challenges us to be a people "in the world," but not "of the world."



Illustrator Photo/David Rogers

Bust of Domitian, Roman emperor when John wrote Revelation.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to identify the characteristics of Babylon that resulted in its downfall; and to identify some current similar characteristics of religion, government, or business that they should work to change.

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) For use in Step 2, make a poster listing five characteristics of Babylon (Kit item 18).

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains these helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 18—Poster: Characteristics of Babylon;

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 17:6-13; 18:2-5

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Share the following. Several historians, like Spengler and Gibbon, agree remarkably in their interpretation of some of the factors in the decline of Rome. After two centuries of greatness, the second-century signs of decay and collapse included the great increase of the idle rich and idle poor. The poor were put on a welfare system for a permanent handout from government. This group organized into a powerful political force. The government of Rome bowed to its pressure. In the process, the middle class was taxed more and more. Young men began avoiding the once-honored military service of Rome. They took to using cosmetics and wearing feminine hairdos and clothing. Morals declined. It became unsafe to walk in the country or on city streets. Rioting became common. Finally, taxation and inflation overcame energy and ambition. The result was decline and death. Rome passed into what history often calls the Dark Ages.

Ask members to identify similarities with society today. Invite members to compare today's situation and that described in Revelation 17 and 18 concerning what is called Babylon.

**2** *To help members realize how formidable Christ's enemies are:* Explain that 17:6 concludes a passage which describes the harlot Babylon. Point out that Babylon is spoken of first as a harlot, then later as a city (17:18).

Ask members to look at the following list of characteristics (Kit item 18), then read silently 17:1-6 to find statements which might suggest each characteristic.

(1) Influences the rulers of the earth (17:2a)



- (2) Influences the citizens of the earth (17:2b)
- (3) Blasphemes God (17:3)
- (4) Attractive to people (17:4)
- (5) Murderer of God's people (17:6)

Ask members to identify some of the more powerful present-day enemies of Christ. (drug traffic, alcohol industry, international terrorism) Ask members to suggest to what extent the same characteristics on the poster fit or do not fit these modern enemies.

**3** *To lead members to see the extent of Satan's penetration in the organized functions of the world:* Write on the board: seven heads, ten horns. Ask a volunteer to read aloud 17:7-13 as the others listen for what is said about the two phrases on the board.

Recall what was said in 13:1-3 about the beast's origin, appearance, and power. Use the "Focal Passage Study" of 17:8 to prepare a brief explanation about the beast. Also consult *Bible Book Study Commentary*. Emphasize the beast's three stages of existence and who was impressed by that existence.

Refer to the first phrase. Ask members to identify from 7:9-10 the two symbolic meanings of the "seven heads." (Seven mountains, seven kings) Briefly give the several views about the meaning of the seven mountains. (See "Perspectives.") (Seven hills of first-century Rome, symbol of power and rule, seven empires and their rulers, a revived Roman Empire of the end time) Ask members to read 17:10-11 for the second meaning of the seven heads. (Seven kings) Briefly point out the views about the seven kings. (Succession of Roman emperors, seven world kingdoms)

Call attention to the second phrase on the board. Ask members to read silently 17:12-13 to see what is said about the ten horns. Briefly point out the views about these "ten kings." (European kingdoms of a revived Roman Empire, symbolic designation of the Antichrist's power, symbolic of the various realms of life) Ask members to respond to two questions: To what extent are these various realms sometimes opposed to Christian values and Christ's purposes? How could the Antichrist (the beast) use these areas of society to oppose Christ and His people?

**4** *To encourage members to work for better ethics in politics and business:* Ask members to scan 18:2-3, then ask three different people to tell what is said about the nations, kings, and the merchants. Point out that the focus is on the political and business leaders of the world. In light of the utter desolation of "Babylon the great" in verse 2, ask members to suggest ways the presence and activities of Christians

could make a difference today in politics or business. (Explore such questions as: Can a leader be thoroughly Christian and a successful politician today? Can Christian ethics survive without any compromise in the modern business world?)

**5** *To challenge members to separate themselves from sinful practices:* Ask members to suggest from 18:4-5 why Christians should be morally separate from sinful practices that go on in the world. (God calls us to do so, to avoid punishment, to demonstrate that we are God's people.) Ask why some professing Christians might think it necessary to "do battle" on the level of the world in the areas of politics and business.

**6** *To help members identify the characteristics of Babylon that resulted in its downfall:* Divide class into groups of three or four. Ask groups to suggest the characteristics of Babylon mentioned in chapters 17 and 18 that contributed to its downfall. Allow groups about 5 minutes. As groups report, write the key words of each group on the board. (Your list could include such things as unfaithfulness to God, luxury, immorality, opposition to God's saints, and idolatrous worship.)

**7** *To help members identify some current characteristics of religion, government, or business that they should work to change:* Assign one-third of the class to each of these areas: religion, government, or business. Ask them to identify actions Christians could and should work to change. End by asking, How can one concerned Christian make a difference?

# The Victorious Christ

**Background Passage:** Revelation 19:1-21

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 19:7,9,11-17,19-21a

**Central Truth:** The description of the marriage supper and Christ's absolute victory over evil encourages Christians to be faithful, confident of the ultimate defeat of evil.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. Praise in Heaven for God's Judgment of the Harlot (19:1-5)
2. The Marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10)
3. Victorious Christ Leads a Victorious Army (19:11-16)
4. The Supper of the Great God (19:17-18)
5. Judgment on the Beast and His Followers (19:19-21)

Excitement builds in heaven because of the fall and judgment of Babylon and the anticipation of the climactic coming of Christ.

*Praise in heaven for God's judgment of the harlot (19:1-5).*—John heard a great multitude in heaven shouting praises to God because he had judged and punished the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her sin. God avenged the murder of his servants. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God and joined in the praises.

*The marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10).*—Again John heard what seemed like the shouting of a great multitude in heaven, praising the Lord, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, has begun His reign. John was told it is time to rejoice for the marriage banquet of the Lamb had come. His bride had prepared herself for this hour. She was to be clothed with the whitest, finest, and cleanest of linen which represents the righteous deeds of the people of God. The angel told John to write, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

*Victorious Christ leads a victorious army (19:11-16).*—Then John saw heaven opened, and there was a powerful, majestic figure sitting on a white horse. His name was "Faithful and True," and He justly punishes and makes war on evil. His eyes were like a flames and on his head were many crowns. He had a name written which only He knew. He was clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his title was "The Word of God." The armies of heaven, dressed in fine linen, white and clean, followed

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Bride, wife (19:7)	Total of all the redeemed		The church; does not include Old Testament saints or tribulation saints
Bride's clothing (19:8)	Symbolizes faithfulness and righteousness; a contrast to harlot's clothing (17:4)	Stands in contrast to harlot's clothing	"Righteousness" is plural so here depicts righteous acts of individual Christians; the basis of their being judged and basis of their clothing for the marriage (as opposed to the later judgment of nations)
Marriage supper (19:9)	Climax of the age; symbolizes complete union of Christ with His people	Union of Christ with His people at His Coming	Union of Christ with His church accompanied by Old Testament saints and tribulation saints
One on white horse (19:11-16)	Vision of Christ's victory over pagan Rome; return of Christ occurs in connection with events of 20:7-10	Second coming of Christ	
Blood on his vesture (19:13)	That of Christ's conquered enemies		His own blood of redemption
Armies with Christ (19:14)	Heavenly armies, possibly victorious saints	Heavenly host of angels	Saints of former dispensations, of the church, and of the tribulation

Battle of Armageddon (19:19-21; see 16:16)	Not literally at end of time but symbolizes power of God's word overcoming evil; principle applies to all ages	Literal event of some kind at end-time but not literal battle with military weapons; occurs at Christ's return at beginning of millennium	Literal bloody battle at Armageddon (valley of Megiddo) at end of great tribulation between kings of the East and federation of nations of new Rome; they are all defeated by blast from Christ's mouth and then millennium begins
Great supper (19:17)	Stands in contrast to marriage supper		Concludes series of judgments and opens way for kingdom to be established

Him on white horses. His words were like a sharp sword to the nations. He will rule them with an iron grip. He will tread the wine-press of the wrath of God. On his robe and thigh was written, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

*The supper of the great God (19:17-18).*—Then John saw an angel standing in the sun, calling with a loud voice to all the birds that fly in the middle of heaven, to come to the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of kings, commanders, fighting men, horses and riders; and of all humanity, both great and small, slave and free.

*Judgment on the beast and his followers (19:19-21).*—Then John saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered to fight against the one who sat on the white horse and against His army. The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had deceived the world by his signs. Both were thrown into the lake of fire. Their armies were killed with the sharp sword of Him who sat on the white horse. All the birds gorged themselves with their flesh.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB (19:7)

<sup>7</sup>Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

.....  
<sup>9</sup>And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.



**Verse 7.** John brought to a close the vision of God's judgment of the harlot (vv. 1-5) and gave a glimpse of the next great vision, the marriage of Christ and His bride (vv. 6-10).

*The marriage of the Lamb is come.*—The first-century Christians were very familiar with the idea of marriage representing the relationship of God with His people. Israel was often described as the wife of Jehovah (Isa. 54:5-6).

Some interpreters understand the marriage to be the climax of the age and the complete union of Christ with His people. Others understand that Christ has come for His church at "the rapture," and the marriage supper takes place just before the second coming.

*Wife hath made herself ready.*—This has been done by her putting on bridal garments. There is a contrast between the dress of the harlot (17:4; 18:16) and the wedding garments of the bride (19:8). The white garments are symbolic of purity and righteousness. Some interpret the wife to be the sum-total of all the redeemed, the church. Others understand the wife to be only Christians of the church age. (See "Perspectives.")

**Verse 9.** This is a supper of fellowship based on love. The actual wedding feast is not described.

*They which are called.*—The word for called means "invited." Persons are not invited to the marriage feast on their own merits; they must receive a divine invitation. Salvation is always begun with the call of God.

Who are the "called?" Some understand them to be the same as the bride. Others make a distinction between the called and the bride. The called would refer to the Old Testament saints and tribulation saints. The bride would refer to the church only. (See "Perspectives.")

*True sayings.*—To assure John and his readers of the certainty of the announcement of the wedding supper of the Lamb, the angel added, "These are the true sayings of God." In the midst of the confusion and conflict of life, there is given the assurance that the words are the unfailing words of God.

## **VICTORIOUS CHRIST LEADS A VICTORIOUS ARMY (19:11-16)**

<sup>11</sup>And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. <sup>12</sup>His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. <sup>13</sup>And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. <sup>14</sup>And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

<sup>15</sup>And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. <sup>16</sup>And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

John saw Christ coming as a conquering warrior in bloodstained garments, destroying all hostile and opposing powers with His mighty sword.

At the beginning of John's visions, he saw a "door" opened in heaven (4:1). Now it is no mere door, but heaven itself which stands wide open to reveal Christ in all His glory (19:11).

**Verse 11.** In His cross and resurrection, Christ won a great victory over the power of evil; by His second coming, He will fully execute that victory.

*A white horse.*—White is a symbol of victory. The white horse here represents Christ in His final victory over the evil powers which have oppressed the people of God throughout the course of the age.

*Faithful and True.*—These two words are practically synonymous in meaning. The Hebrew idea of truth was not basically reality, as in Greek thought, but reliability. When John wrote in his Gospel that "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), he meant that in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the faithfulness of God was revealed in fulfillment of His covenant promises. The return of Christ will bring God's covenant promises to their final and full consummation. Because He is faithful, He cannot allow His people to struggle alone; and because He is true, He must bring truth to victory.

*In righteousness he doth judge and make war.*—A question was asked in 13:4—Who can make war against the beast? That question is answered here: Christ! The return of Christ in victory over His enemies will be no act of personal vengeance or an arbitrary manifestation of divine power. It will be an act of righteousness reflecting the faithfulness of God.

**Verse 12.** John gave here one of the most powerful portraits of Christ found in Revelation.

*His eyes were as a flame of fire.*—This represents the all-searching gaze of Christ. Nothing is hidden from His view.

*On his head were many crowns.*—He wears the crown of royalty because He is King of kings and Lord of lords. His "many crowns" are symbolic of His complete sovereignty.

*He had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*—Through-

out the ancient world a name revealed the nature of an individual, who he is and what he is. Christ had already been named as "Faithful and True" (v. 11). He will be called "The Word of God" in verse 13. Here He has a name which no one knows but Himself. This secret name apparently means that the human mind cannot grasp the depth of His being. It transcends all human understanding.

**Verse 13.** John mentions another name for Christ.

*He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.*—The robe dipped in blood may refer to the garments bloodied from conflict and battle. Christ is pictured here as the warrior and conqueror of all evil. However, some interpreters understand this to refer to the blood of Christ shed at the cross.

*His name is called The Word of God.*—In the New Testament, the Word of God is primarily the good news of the Gospel, whether proclaimed by Jesus (Luke 5:1) or by the apostles (1 Thess. 2:13). Christ in His own person is the Word of God, the embodiment of God's total redemptive provision.

**Verse 14.** In the vision of Christ's coming, John also saw the armies of heaven coming with Christ.

*The armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses.*—The presence of angels accompanying the second coming of Christ is common in Scripture. Notice, however, they apparently wear no armor and carry no weapons. The victory is Christ's alone. However, some understand this army to be saints. Others see the army as a combination of both angels and saints.

*Clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*—The pure, white clothing of the heavenly armies indicates that they share in both the righteous character and victory of the Lord.

**Verse 15.** The victory of Christ over all of the enemies of evil is shown in three symbols—the sharp sword, the rod of iron, and the winepress.

*Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword.*—The only weapon involved in the warfare is the Word of Christ. God created the world by His Word. He spoke and it was done. Here is a symbolic representation of the final victory by the power of His Word. He speaks and the battle is over. Some interpreters feel that "rod of iron" relates to Christ's strong rule during the millennium.

*He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*—This is a further allusion to the idea of a harvest ripe for judgment being trodden in God's wine-press (compare 14:18-20).

**Verse 16.** The dominating idea in these symbols is that of complete victory.

*On his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.*—Another descriptive name for Jesus was on his garments. This twofold name designates the absolute sovereignty of Christ. For the believer, this is already true (1 Cor. 8:5-6). At Christ's coming, this will become a reality acknowledged by all.

### THE SUPPER OF THE GREAT GOD (19:17)

**<sup>17</sup>And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God;**

John saw the final triumph of Christ over Antichrist and his supporters, which is depicted in terms of a great battle. Then John saw the triumph of Christ over Satan himself.

*An angel standing in the sun.*—John saw an angel standing where all the birds of the earth could see him. All the birds were summoned to gather to partake of the great supper of God (vv. 17-18). It is a vivid picture describing a great and decisive destruction of the enemies of God. The triumph of God's kingdom over its enemies is celebrated by a joyful feast for the righteous (vv. 6-10) and by a nightmare feast for the scavenging birds of prey.

### JUDGMENT ON THE BEAST AND HIS FOLLOWERS (19:19-21a)

**<sup>19</sup>And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. <sup>20</sup>And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. <sup>21a</sup>And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth:**

John saw the forces of the enemy drawn up to make war against Christ and His army. At the head of these forces is the beast, the Antichrist himself. Supporting him are the kings of the earth.

**Verse 19.** The inspiration behind the rebellion is the beast, the false prophet, and the dragon. The beast is at the head, with him are earth's kings and their armies. Their object is to fight against Him that sat on the horse and against His army.

*Gathered together to make war.*—There are various interpretations

concerning this war. Some do not interpret this as a literal end-of-time battle, but a symbol of an on-going battle between God and Satan. Others understand this to be an actual event of some kind at the end of time, but not a literal battle with military weapons. Others see this as a literal battle at the end of time primarily fought in the Middle East. Regardless of one's view, the main point is that the Lord Jesus is completely victorious over all the forces of evil. (See "Perspectives.")

Some understand the kings to represent the political leaders of the people of the world. Others understand the kings to symbolize all the antichristian forces of the world.

There is no description of the battle with the kings, but instead, we are told of the defeat of Antichrist. John merely stated that the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet, and they were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone (v. 20).

**Verse 20.** The victory of Christ over evil is certain.

*Cast alive into a lake of fire.*—Some interpret this fire as literal. Others understand it to be symbolic. The casting is thought by some to be an actual occurrence at the end of time. Some believe the casting of the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire to be for one thousand years, and then their final doom will come after this. Still others see this as God's on-going victory over Satan.

This is a symbol of utter destruction. John meant that the destruction of these powers is as complete as if they were thrown into a burning lake.

**Verse 21a.** John referred briefly to the destruction of the armies of Antichrist, consisting of the kings of the earth and those who had been led by the false prophet to receive the mark of the beast and to worship the image (vv. 19-20).

*The remnant.*—The rest includes all the antichristian forces described as those following the beast and the false prophet.

*Slain with the sword.*—All John said here is that they were slain by the sword of Him who sits on His horse. The sword issues from His mouth (v. 15). The sword is the symbol for the powerful utterance of Christ. The truth of Christ's word serves as a means of condemnation of His enemies.

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *God is to be praised for His fair and righteous judgments.*—This is the only passage in the New Testament in which the word "Alleluia" occurs (19:6). Christians rejoice when they truly understand that God is going to manifest His sovereign control by lifting up that which is righteous, and destroying that which is unrighteous.

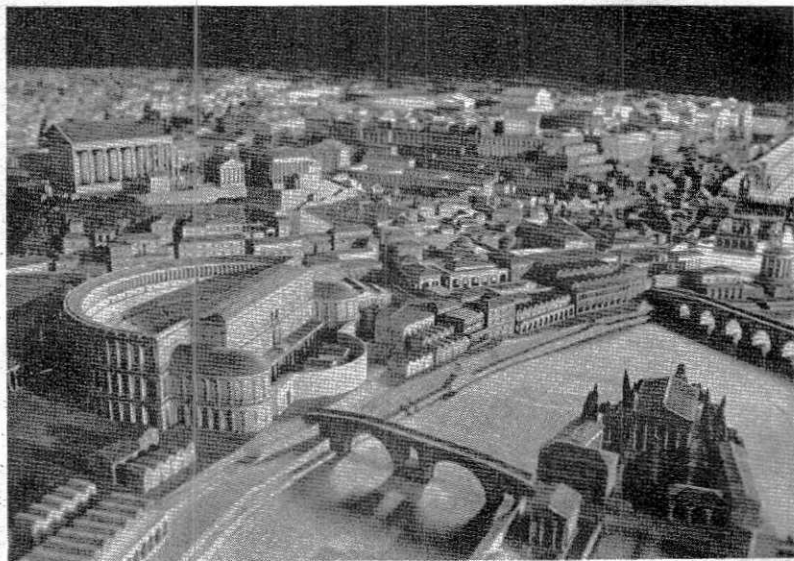
2. *Good deeds are the fruit of a righteous life.*—Because we have been clothed with righteousness by the grace and mercy of Christ, Christians



should serve Him faithfully out of gratitude. Those who have lived righteously will be prepared to face the Lord joyfully.

3. *The evil which has long threatened to destroy God's creation has at last been destroyed.*—God has put into Christ's hands, whom the world rejected and killed, the power to make all nations, all creation, bow before His will. With the fall of the world-system, which has plagued the earth throughout the centuries, the entire watching universe breaks forth with shouts of gratitude.

4. *The second coming of Christ will be a time of rejoicing for the believers, but a time of rejection for the lost.*—Jesus came the first time as a humble servant; He will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords. He came the first time as Savior; He will come the second time as Judge. Those who have not met Him by faith through His first coming will surely face Him in judgment at His second coming.



Illustrator Photo/Ken Touchton

Model of Rome, capital of the Roman Empire.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to explain the significance of the marriage supper, the names of Christ, the great supper, and the battle of Armageddon; and to identify ways the names of the victorious Christ can influence the way they live

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) Prepare the study guide for use in Step 2 (Kit item 19); (3) Prepare the poster called for in Step 3 (Kit item 20).

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains the following helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 19—Study Guide: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb; Item 20—Poster: The Description of Christ in Revelation 10:11-16.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 19:7,9,11-17,19-21a

**1** *To create interest in the Bible study:* Ask members to consider the following situation: Suppose the President of the United States wanted to gain first-hand knowledge of the concerns and problems of the average American family. To do so, he decided to become a guest in a typical home—your home—for thirty days. In view of a forthcoming visit from such a guest, what would you do to get ready for his arrival? What changes in their daily or weekly routine would family members likely make during the month's visit.

Point out that the victorious Christ is coming again. Invite members to turn to the focal passage and to think about how the prospect of Christ's coming should influence the way we live now.

**2** *To understand the significance of the marriage supper:* Direct members to the "Perspectives" to see how the three views interpret the marriage supper in Revelation 19. Emphasize that the supper describes a union between Christ and His people, even though differences exist as to who constitutes the "bride" in the passage. Call for one volunteer to read 19:7 and another, 19:9.

Give each member a copy of the following study guide (Kit item 19):

### The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

(1) What human response is called for in view of the marriage supper?

(2) How had the Lamb's bride made herself ready? \_\_\_\_\_

(3) Why were those called to the supper blessed? \_\_\_\_\_

(4) How do you know all this is going to happen? \_\_\_\_\_

Ask members to choose a partner and discuss some possible answers to each question. Allow about 5 minutes. Ask volunteers to share their answers.

**3** *To explain the significance of Christ's appearance, actions, and name:* Prepare the following poster (Kit item 20):

**The Description of Christ**  
**Revelation 19:11-16**

	Description	Scripture	Meaning
His Appearance	white horse on which He sat eyes head garments armies which followed Him sword in His mouth		
His Actions	judges and makes war smites the nations rules with a rod of iron treads the winepress of God's wrath		
His Names	Faithful and True The Word of God King of Kings and Lord of Lords		

Ask members to listen for the description of Christ's appearance as you read 19:11-16. Write the verse reference in the "Scripture" column. In the "Meaning" column write the truths or impressions the description of Christ's appearance suggests. (Such ideas could include: White horse=symbol of victory; Eyes=all-searching gaze; Head=crowned as royalty; Garments=bloodied by victorious warfare or by sacrificial

death; Armies=accompanying angels or saints; Sword=power of His word.) Do this with the other two sections of the poster.

Ask members to summarize the truth set forth about Christ by this passage.

**4** *To understand the significance of the great supper:* Ask a volunteer to read aloud 19:17. Then ask for responses to the question, How does this supper differ from the marriage supper in 19:7-9? (Both the participants and the purpose.)

**5** *To see the significance of the battle of Armageddon:* Write on the board: combatants, outcome. Ask someone to read 19:19-21a. Point out that these verses are usually seen as a description of the battle mentioned but not described in 16:16. Ask members to name the combatants that make up each side in the battle. Use the listing to refresh members' memories about the identities of the beast, false prophet, and kings of the earth. (Refer back to the lessons on chapters 13, 16, and 17.)

Point out that a description of the battle itself is not given, but the final outcome is. Be prepared to discuss briefly the various interpretations given to the lake of fire. (See "Focal Passage Study" and *Bible Book Study Commentary* on these verses.)

**6** *To challenge lost adults to evaluate their present commitments:* Point out that only two armies are named in the final battle. People's commitment places them on one side or the other, but not on middle ground. Make the point that while some nations and people today attempt to be neutral in their political alignment, no one can be neutral when life's final destiny is decided. Ask, How can people guarantee that they will participate with Christ's army? Use their replies to point out to any lost persons present the wisdom of deciding for Christ now.

**7** *To identify ways the truth about Christ's victory can influence the way they live:* List the following on the board: The kind of person I am, the actions I can take personally, the ministries my church can do collectively, the shape of my denomination's program. Call for ways that the assurance of Christ's final victory should affect each area listed. (Ideas about the church and the denomination should include the State Mission Offering of your State Convention, as well as support for some of the ministries the offering makes possible.)

Conclude by asking four members to lead in sentence prayers for each of the four areas listed. Pray that members' lives will be different because of their strong conviction about Christ's final victory.

# The Millennium and the Final Judgment

**Background Passage:** Revelation 20:1-15

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 20:2-8a,11-15

**Central Truth:** The reward of the faithful martyrs, the destruction of Satan and death, and the great white throne judgment compel all people to repent of sin and respond to Christ as Savior and Lord.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. Satan Bound for One Thousand Years (20:1-3)
2. Resurrection and Millennium (20:4-6)
3. Satan Loosed (20:7-10)
4. Judgment Before the Great White Throne (20:11-15)

Having related the destruction of Antichrist (19:20), John next related the conquest and destruction of the beast's master—Satan himself.

*Satan bound for one thousand years (29:1-3).*—John saw an angel come down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a heavy chain. He seized the dragon, or Satan, and chained him for a thousand years. The angel threw him into the bottomless pit, shutting and sealing it over him, so that he could not fool the nations any more until the thousand years were finished. Then he must be released again for a short while.

*Resurrection and millennium (20:4-6).*—John saw those who had experienced the first resurrection sitting on thrones. Some of them were martyrs who had given their lives to testify about Jesus and proclaim God's Word. They had neither worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark. Christ had given them the right to reign with him for the thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.

*Satan loosed (20:7-10).*—When the thousand years ended, Satan was let out of prison. He deceived the nations into gathering together to war against God's people. They surrounded the people of God on every side, but fire from God came down and consumed the attacking armies. The devil was thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet were, to be tormented day and night forever.



## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
Millennium (20:2-6)	Symbolic reference to period from Christ's first coming to His second	A historical event, though length of one thousand years may be symbolic, after Armageddon during which Christ rules with His people	A literal one thousand year period after the church age during which Christ rules with His people but especially through the Jews from Jerusalem and during which time the gospel of David is preached
Binding of Satan (20:2)	Symbolic of Christ's resurrection victory over Satan	Curbing of Satan's power during the millennium	
Those on thrones (20:4)	Martyrs in heaven, their presence with God a judgment on those who killed them	Saints and martyrs who rule with Christ in the millennium	The redeemed ruling with Christ, appearing and disappearing on earth at will to oversee life on earth
First resurrection (20:5-6)	The spiritual presence with Christ of the redeemed that occurs after physical death	Resurrection of saints at beginning of millennium when Christ returns	Includes three groups: (1) those raptured with church (4:1); (2) Jewish tribulation saints during tribulation (11:11); (3) other Jewish believers at beginning of millennium (20:5-6)
Second death (20:6)	Spiritual death, eternal separation from God		
Second resurrection (implied)	All persons, lost and redeemed, rise when Christ returns in only resurrection that takes place	Nonbelievers, resurrected at end of millennium	

Gog and Magog (20:8)	Built off Ezekiel 38-39, symbolic of Satan's forces which seek to storm heaven and destroy God's people	Built off Ezekiel 38-39, represents the hostile nations that will follow Satan in an attack on earthly Jerusalem, the center of the millennial kingdom	The host of those ready to do Satan's bidding when he is loosed
Great white throne judgment (20:11-15)	The only judgment, when everyone who ever lived will be judged		Three judgments: (1) of believers' works (between rapture (between chaps. 3 and 4) and millennium (chap. 20); (2) of Israel at return of Christ (chap. 20); (3) of unredeemed, the great white throne judgment (20:1-15) (some dispensationalists add other judgments)

*Judgment before the great white throne (20:11-15).*—John saw a great white throne and the One who sat on it. The earth and the heaven moved back from the One on the throne. John saw the dead, great and small, standing before God, and books were opened, including the Book of Life. All of the dead were judged according to their deeds. Then death and hell were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death. If anyone's name was not found recorded in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### SATAN BOUND FOR ONE THOUSAND YEARS (20:2-3)

<sup>2</sup>And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, <sup>3</sup>And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

There are various interpretations of what the millennial reign of Christ means. It is necessary to approach this study with humility and love. Amillennialists hold that there is no *literal* millennium. The one-thousand-year period is symbolical. It stands for the whole time between the

life of Jesus on earth and His second coming. This view sees the first resurrection as being present with Christ after physical death. Premillennialists hold that at Christ's return the Christian dead will be raised, and believers still living on earth will be caught up to meet Him in the air. They will reign on earth with Christ for one thousand years (the millennium). After this Satan will be released for a time. This short period will be followed by the raising of the rest of the dead, the unbelievers. This view understands that there are two resurrections. The judgment of the great white throne follows the second resurrection. The basic difference between dispensational premillennialists and historical premillennialists is their view regarding the church and the tribulation. Dispensationalists believe the church will be raptured out of the tribulation. Historical premillennialists believe the church will go through the tribulation (see "Perspectives").

**Verse 2.** After the judgment on the beast, the false prophet, and the multitude whom they led astray (19:20), the ultimate enemy is dealt with—the dragon. A nameless angel suffices to reduce the devil to powerlessness when God so decrees.

*The dragon.*—Satan is described here by the same names as in 12:9. As the "dragon," Satan is the foe of heaven who has inspired the evil powers of history, but whose destruction has been assured from the beginning. As "that old serpent," he is the deceiver of humanity, who brought ruin to man from Eden onwards. As "the devil" and "Satan," he is the accuser or slanderer of humanity.

*Bound him.*—Many find it difficult to understand the thousand years for which Satan is bound with strict literalness in view of the obvious symbolic use of numbers in the Revelation.

Some see the binding of Satan as a symbolic way of describing a curbing of his power and activity. His binding does not seem to mean that all of his activities and powers are nullified, only that he may no longer deceive the nations as he has done throughout human history. Others understand this to refer to the victory of Christ over Satan at the cross. Others, however, believe that Satan is literally bound and placed in a prison.

*A thousand years.*—Some see this as a symbolic reference to the period from Christ's first to His second coming. Others understand it to be a literal period of time, but indefinite as to length. One thousand years indicates a perfect length of time. Others understand it to be the seventh dispensation of time, after the church age, a literal period of time of one thousand years in which Christ rules with His saints. This is understood to be a continuation of the kingdom originally given to David. (See

“Perspectives.”)

**Verse 3.** The degree of Satan’s binding is symbolically pictured in the bottomless pit.

*Cast him into the bottomless pit.*—The bottomless pit is the abyss from which demonic locusts swarmed forth to torture men (9:1-6). In that vision an angel had the key to the abyss which he used to open a shaft releasing the demonic locusts. The abyss is also the home of the beast (11:7). Some interpret verse 3 literally. Others understand it to be a symbolic picture describing a radical curbing of Satan’s power and activities.

*He should deceive the nations no more.*—Satan’s chief strategy has been deception. The meaning of binding him is that “he should deceive the nations no more,” until the thousand years period is fulfilled. The mention of the nations may refer specifically to “the kings of the earth” led astray by the glamour and glitter of the evil government symbolically called Babylon and the great harlot (17:1-5).

*Loosed a little season.*—In the mystery of God’s will Satan is allowed to deceive those who choose to follow him. Some understand this to be a last-ditch effort by Satan to deceive the world at the end of the age just before Christ’s coming. Others understand this to be his last effort after Christ’s millennial reign, demonstrating the rebellious nature of the human heart even under the most ideal of conditions.

## RESURRECTION AND MILLENNIUM (20:4-6)

<sup>4</sup>And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. <sup>5</sup>But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

John sees the people of God as priests who have been resurrected from the dead and live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

**Verse 4.** In some amazing, perhaps even mysterious way, believers are privileged to participate in the kingdom of God.

*I saw thrones.*—How many groups does John see? Some interpreters recognize only one group and limit this “first resurrection” to the martyrs of the tribulation period. They maintain that God has some special blessing for those who died because of their faithful witness to Jesus. Others understand that the language suggests two different groups: a larger group of all believers, and a smaller group who are the martyrs of the great tribulation. Some would not limit the martyrs to the tribulation, but would include all the martyrs of all the ages singled out for special attention. Others see this group as a combination of saints and martyrs who will rule with Christ in the millennial kingdom, appearing and disappearing on earth at will to oversee those who live on the earth. (See “Perspectives.”)

*They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*—The phrase “they lived” is the most important phrase in the entire passage. This phrase comes from one Greek word, the meaning of which determines how this entire passage is interpreted. The question is whether it means bodily resurrection. Some would understand that it refers to the spiritual resurrection of the believer when he accepts Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus used the word this way in John 5:25. The word, however, is also used of bodily resurrection in John 11:25. The same word is used in verse 5 here which seems to indicate a physical resurrection. Therefore, this has led many to believe that both uses of the word are to be taken in the same way, referring to a literal resurrection. In this view, at the beginning of the millennial period, part of the dead (believers) come to life; at its conclusion, the rest of the dead (unbelievers) come to life to receive condemnation.

**Verse 5.** John indicates there will be a resurrection of the dead after the one thousand years.

*The rest of the dead.*—Some believe that the first resurrection is spiritual so that “the rest of the dead . . .” refers to a single physical resurrection when Christ returns.

Others understand that “rest of the dead” refers to nonbelievers resurrected after the millennium, while the first resurrection is of saints at the beginning of the millennium when Christ returns. They conclude that if the first resurrection includes all saints and martyrs, the rest of the dead includes all who have not known and believed in Christ. Others also understand the phrase “the rest of the dead” to refer to the unredeemed who have not come to life but with no reference to a millennial kingdom.

**Verse 6.** The supreme joy of the blessed ones is that they are associated with Christ in priesthood and royalty. John said that the second death has no power over those who share in the first resurrection.



*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.*—John did not use the phrase “second resurrection,” but he does use the word “second death.” Some understand the first resurrection as a spiritual operation. This view would see John describing the blessedness of those who have a part in the spiritual resurrection with Christ. No one who shares in the first resurrection is subject to the power of the second death. This is the blessing.

The second death is the eternal separation from God which the unredeemed experience after physical death. The first death is the death of the physical body which all humanity, except those living at the second coming, experience. The second death is eternal death in the lake of fire (v. 14).

*They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*—Those who share in the first resurrection are called blessed and and holy and priests of God and Christ because they have access to the immediate presence of God, and because they share in His reign. Just how we are to conceive of their participation in Christ’s reign is uncertain. Some believe that the saints will be in their resurrection bodies. Others believe those reigning with Christ here are the martyrs in heaven.

#### **SATAN LOOSED (20:7-8a)**

**7**And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,<sup>8a</sup> And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle:

**Verses 7-8a.** Satan gathers hostile nations together for one final effort to frustrate the purpose of God for all his creation.

*Satan shall be loosed . . . to deceive the nations.*—Some believe this verse suggests the reason for a temporal reign of Christ on the earth during the millennium period. The willingness of many to follow Satan even after experiencing the influence of Christ’s righteous rule during the millennium makes it plain that the ultimate root of sin is not poverty or inadequate social conditions or an unfortunate environment; it is the rebelliousness of the human heart. Others interpret this passage in a spiritual sense in that Satan has been bound and overthrown by Christ’s work at the cross. However, his final and complete elimination from the scene and the termination of this evil and corrupt age does not occur until the very end. These interpreters understand this verse to reflect the tenacity of evil and also the final victory of Christ over it.

*Gog and Magog.*—These are biblical names for the nations who are rebellious against God and hostile to His people. In Ezekiel 38:1, Gog

is the prince of the land of Magog and comes from the north in the latter days to do battle with God's people. In the passage in Ezekiel the names are symbolical of foes of the people of God. John seems to use the terms to denote the ungodly people of the world among whom Satan still exercises power. Some understand this to be the last futile attack of evil on the things of God.

#### **JUDGMENT BEFORE THE GREAT WHITE THRONE (20:11-15)**

<sup>11</sup>And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. <sup>13</sup>And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. <sup>14</sup>And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. <sup>15</sup>And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

John described in vivid pictures of a courtroom the final judgment of humanity.

**Verse 11.** John saw God as the Almighty Judge with absolute power and purity administering His justice.

*A great white throne, and him that sat on it.*—There are different views as to the meaning of the great white throne of judgment. Those who believe there will be one resurrection interpret this judgment as the only judgment, the judgment of everyone who has ever lived. Others interpret the great white throne as the judgment of the unsaved only. This view holds that the saved have already been judged at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

The throne is white displaying the glory and majesty of God. Although John did not identify the one who sat on the throne, it seems clear that it is God. John painted an awesome picture of the Judge on His throne.

*The earth and the heaven fled away.*—There was something about the One on the throne that caused the earth and heaven to flee away from Him. Some interpret this as the old order vanishing, making way for a new heaven and a new earth. The old creation has run its course and must die, that it may be renewed into a more permanent form.

**Verse 12.** The destiny of humanity is represented under the image of a courtroom procedure.

*The dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened.*—Some interpret this to be inclusive of all humanity. No one will escape the judgment of God. His judgment is universal and inclusive of all. Others believe that only the unbelieving of all the ages will stand before God at this judgment.

Although John did not identify the books, they seem to be books in which the deeds of humanity are recorded, both good and evil. This does not mean that anyone will be saved on the basis of his good works. Some believe that this judgment will constitute the degree of punishment which unbelievers will receive in eternity.

*The book of life.*—Along with the books of works, there appears the Book of Life. The Book of Life records the names of the redeemed. This is the ultimate evidence which exposes the unbeliever.

**Verse 13.** The real significance of this scene is the fact that none will escape the judgment of God.

*The sea gave up the dead . . . death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged.*—Some understand that the separate mention of the sea and death and hell as giving up the dead in them is a way of indicating that all the dead are included. All the dead, wherever they have died, are included in the judgment. Others believe only the wicked are in mind here.

**Verse 14.** John declared the certain overthrow and destruction of all of the enemies of God.

*Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*—Death and hell (Greek, *hades*) are the common foe of all men. They have long been the dread enemies of humanity, but their power is only temporary. Now death and hell are thrown into the same lake as the beast, the false prophet, and the dragon (19:20; 20:10). This signifies complete victory over these agents of evil. The end of the verse explains that being cast into this lake of fire is the second death.

**Verse 15.** This chapter ends with the affirmation that anyone whose name did not appear in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire. John saw a sharp division of humanity into the saved and the lost. In the end, humanity will share in either the blessings of heaven or the punishment of the lake of fire. This verse also indicates that no one will be saved by his works, but rather whether his name has been recorded in the Book of Life. This accords with the teaching of Paul that salvation can be found not by works of righteousness but only through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *The mystery of the devil, like the mystery of evil itself, lies hidden in the depths of the mystery of God's purpose for His creation.*—In the last analysis, the devil cannot defeat God's purpose. It's beyond his power to frustrate it. The end of time is in God's control, not Satan's.

2. *Christ's purpose in life is for the believer to reign over the problems and conflicts of life.*—God does not allow Satan to have power over believers. If a Christian is overpowered by Satan, it is because he has yielded to temptation and chosen to disobey the Lord.

3. *Serving Christ may cost some Christians their lives.*—However, death is not to be feared. Christ has conquered its power and will finally abolish it forever.

4. *God's judgment will reveal through the records whether our loyalties were with God or with God's enemies.*—Works are unmistakable evidence of the loyalty of the heart; they express either belief or unbelief, faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

5. *Everyone will spend eternity somewhere.*—God has given us the choice. Our relationship with Jesus Christ determines our eternal destiny. If we have received Him as Lord and Savior, we will live and reign with Him forever. If we have rejected Him, He will reject us forever.

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to explain the significance of the millennium, the faithful martyrs, Satan's final defeat, and the great white throne judgment; and to accept Christ as Savior and Lord

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Continue to display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) Prepare the poster called for in Step 2 (Kit item 21); (3) Prepare the poster called for in Step 6 (Kit item 22). (4) Prepare the group assignments for use in Step 4 (Kit item 23).

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains these helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 21—Strips: Some Aspects of the Millennial Views; Item 22—Poster: The Great White Throne Judgment; Item 23—Group Assignments.

## A LESSON PLAN: Revelation 20:2-8a, 11-15

**1** *To create interest in Bible study:* Write on the chalkboard: "Actions have consequences." Then share the following illustration: Betty had been a social drinker most of her adult life. However, when her last child married and left home, she began to spend more and more time by herself. Gradually she increased her drinking until she was dependent on alcohol to get her through the day. What had begun as a way of having a good time ended in a tragedy.

Point out that what we do with our lives does have consequences. This is also true spiritually. Our lesson today is about the eternal consequences of our actions in this life.

Invite members to turn to the focal passage for a study that covers several truths, but concludes with a passage about God's eternal punishment of the wicked.

**2** *To see the significance of the millennium:* Write the word "millennium = 1,000 years" on the board. Explain that since the word millennium is not in the Scripture passage, members will want to notice each time the phrase "a thousand years" is used. Ask volunteers to rotate in reading aloud 20:2-7, while everyone underlines the phrase each time it appears. (Six times in KJV)

Cut the following poster (Kit item 21) apart and tape all pieces to the wall. Place the titles in one column and the definitions in another. Ask members to match the title and correct description. Point out that all three views believe that Jesus is coming again to climax world history.



When all strips have been matched according to the outline above, ask members to look for verses in the continuing discussion of the focal passage that help them understand which view they accept.

## Some Aspects of the Millennial Views

### Amillennial

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Symbolic reference to period from Christ's first coming to His second

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### Historical Premillennial

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A historical event, though length of 1,000 years may be symbolic, after Armageddon during which Christ rules with His people

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### Dispensational Premillennial

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A literal 1,000 year period after the church age, during which Christ rules with His people but especially through the Jews from Jerusalem and during which time the gospel of David is preached

**3** *To explain the significance of the faithful martyrs:* Ask members to read again verse 4 silently. As they read, write on the board: "Who are the martyrs?" Number down from 1 to 3. Ask members to turn to the "Perspectives" and find the three views about who the martyrs are. Ask several to explain which explanation seems best to them and why.

**4** *To see the significance of the first resurrection:* Divide members into two discussion groups and give each group a copy of the following assignment (Kit item 23). Ask each group to study

carefully verses 4b-6. Instruct Group 1 to take the view that "the first resurrection" is spiritual (referring to a believer's conversion). Ask Group 2 to take the view that "the first resurrection" is physical (referring to a future bodily resurrection). Ask them to do three things: (1) find other biblical evidence for their view, (2) explain the significance of "the rest of the dead" and their resurrection, which would be the second resurrection referred to in these verses, and (3) explain the significance of the "thousand years" of verse 5, according to the group's assigned view. Ask members to use the "Focal Passage Study" in their quarterlies, the "Perspectives," and *Bible Book Study Commentary*. If possible, make the material in this quarterly available also. As the groups report, be sure each point is fully and clearly explained.

**5** *To understand the significance of Satan's final defeat:* Ask one member to read aloud 20:2-3, another to read 20:7-8, and a third to read 20:10. Point out that these verses present the final defeat of Satan. Present a brief lecture touching on these ideas: (1) a review of what the names of Satan (20:2) say about his nature and work, (2) the views about the time and nature of his binding, (3) the place and purpose of the binding, (4) the possible reasons for a brief loosing, and (5) a review of the meaning of Gog and Magog.

**6** *To explain the significance of the great white throne judgment:* Write on strips of paper (Kit item 22): the basis of judgment, the persons judged, the outcome of judgment. Ask members to scan 20:11-15 to find what is said about each of the phrases. When discussing the basis of judgment, be sure a distinction is made between "works" as the basis of judgment and their place in salvation. Be sure also that inclusion in the book of life is mentioned. When discussing persons judged, acknowledge the variant views that (1) only the lost are in mind, or (2) all people are involved. When discussing the outcome, make sure proper attention is given to "second death" and "lake of fire." (See "Focal Passage Study" for helpful thoughts concerning these areas of discussion. Also be aware of what the outcome described may be saying about the persons appearing in this judgment.)

**7** *To encourage lost adults to accept Christ as Savior and Lord:* Ask members to suggest some truths from this lesson which strongly encourage every person to be a Christian. List these on the board. Suggest members also look at the "Truths from This Lesson" in their quarterly. (Pay special attention to those truths that emphasize the need to accept Christ.) Pray that reflection on these truths will compel the lost to accept Christ without delay.

# The New Jerusalem

**Background Passage:** Revelation 21:1 to 22:21

**Focal Passage:** Revelation 21:1-5a,21-22; 22:1-2,10-12,17

**Central Truth:** The description of the New Jerusalem and the invitation to come to Christ provide assurance of the future blessings Christ has in store for His people, and call the lost to Christ.

## BACKGROUND PASSAGE OVERVIEW

1. The New Jerusalem and Its Inhabitants (21:1-8)
2. The New Jerusalem Described (21:9-21)
3. The New Jerusalem's Glory (21:22-27)
4. Life and Light in the New Jerusalem (22:1-5)
5. Jesus' Final Words Through John (22:6-17)

John had described under various forms the judgment of the last times. Now follows the unveiling of a new order that is not subject to the limitations of time.

*The new Jerusalem and its inhabitants (21:1-8).*—Then John saw a new heaven and a new earth with no sea. The first heaven and earth had passed away. John also saw the new Jerusalem coming down from God. There was a shout from heaven's throne, "Behold, (look) the home (dwelling, tabernacle) of God is now among men. They shall be His people. He will live with them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain. All of that has gone forever."

The One on the throne declared He was making all things new. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He offers the water of life freely to the thirsty. He gives them power to conquer life and inherit all His blessings. He will be their God and they His sons. Those who reject Him will experience the second death.

*The new Jerusalem described (21:9-21).*—One of the seven angels

**Evangelistic Lesson:** This periodical is designed to highlight the Bible's evangelistic message in all passages in which it occurs. However, this lesson especially lends itself to being designated as an evangelistic lesson.

## PERSPECTIVES

	<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Historical Premillennial</b>	<b>Dispensational Premillennial</b>
New heavens and earth (21:1)	A new order; redeemed earth		
New Jerusalem (21:2-5)	God dwelling with His saints (the church) in the new age after all other end-time events		
New Jerusalem (21:10 to 22:5)	Same as 21:2-5		Millennial Jerusalem from which the world will be ruled; the bride as well as the home of the saints
Twelve gates (21:12)	Symbolize ready access to safety; only saints can enter	Means church built on apostles and prophets	Means administrative completeness; government maintains righteousness
Spirit and bride say, Come (22:17)	Invitation from Spirit and church to lost to come to Christ		First part an invitation by Spirit and church to Christ to return; second part invites lost to be saved

invited John to see the Bride of Christ. He showed John the new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. She was filled with the glory of God. She was radiant like a rare jewel. She had a high wall, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. The names of the twelve tribes were written on the gates. The foundation stones had the names of the twelve apostles written on them. The twelve gates were each made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

*The new Jerusalem's glory (21:22-27).*—There was no temple in the city for God and the Lamb are its Temple. There was no need for the sun or moon for the glory of God and the Lamb are its light. The saved of the nations will live in its light and the city's gates will never be shut. Nothing unclean can enter but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

*Life and light in the new Jerusalem (22:1-5).*—John was shown the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On each side of the river was the tree of life with twelve kinds of fruit, bearing a fresh crop each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of

the nations. There shall be no curse in the city, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants will worship Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be written on their foreheads. They shall reign with Him forever.

*Jesus' final words through John (22:6-17).*—John was told that the Lord, the God of the prophets, had sent His angels to show His servants what must soon take place. The Lord said He was coming quickly. All doing evil will continue to do it. The righteous will continue to do right. Blessed are all who have the right to enter in through the gates of the city, and to eat the fruit of the tree of life. Outside are those who have fought against God and love to do evil and lie. The Spirit and the bride invited all who were thirsty to come and drink the water of life without charge. John closed this book with a solemn warning to all who might distort its message.

## FOCAL PASSAGE STUDY

### THE NEW JERUSALEM AND ITS INHABITANTS (21:1-5a)

<sup>1</sup>And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. <sup>2</sup>And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. <sup>4</sup>And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things were passed away. <sup>5a</sup>And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

John contrasted a civilization which had been displeasing to God and destroyed with a new redeemed civilization which is pleasing to Him and which will last for all eternity.

**Verse 1.** John gave a brief statement of the beginning of the new Jerusalem.

*A new heaven and a new earth . . . the first . . . were passed away.*—The disappearance of the earth and the heaven had already been announced (20:11). Now in their place, John saw a new heaven and a new earth. The word “new” designates something which already exists but now appears in a new or fresh aspect. Some interpret this to mean that the ultimate destiny of God’s people is an earthly destiny. They see humanity on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence.



Others understand this to be symbolic, with the complete elimination of the physical universe. Some understand the new heaven and the new earth as a new creation to replace the old creation which has ceased to exist.

*There was no more sea.*—In the ancient world the sea represented the realm of the dark, the mysterious, and the treacherous. The abolishing of the sea may suggest the old order is completely swept away and replaced by something altogether new and different. Some suggest, however, that the statement in verse 5, "Behold, I make all things new," suggests a renovation of what already exists. In either case, the change will be according to God's purpose.

**Verse 2.** Here John merely mentioned the descent of the holy city. In the vision which begins at 21:9, he described the city in considerable detail.

*The holy city, new Jerusalem.*—The New Testament conceives of a heavenly Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God and the true homeland of the saints.

Is the city that comes down out of heaven a literal city or a symbolical city? Some understand it to be symbolical, representing the people of God organized into activities and service for all eternity. The new Jerusalem as pictured here symbolizes redeemed humanity, the church, according to this view. The church is not something man builds; it is something God builds. Some understand the phrase "coming down . . . out of heaven" to emphasize the origin and the source of the church.

Many interpreters believe that this passage also is to be taken as a description of the heavenly dwelling place of God's people.

**Verse 3.** Direct, unmarred fellowship between God and His people is the goal of redemption.

*The tabernacle of God is with men.*—In Old Testament times, God's dwelling-place first was the tabernacle in the wilderness, and later the Temple. In the coming of Christ, God took up His dwelling among men, "The Word . . . dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Book of Revelation tells us here that God will "dwell" with us in an even greater way and the people of God will "see His face" (22:4).

*They shall be his people.*—Fellowship between God and His people is the ultimate goal of salvation. All the promises of God's covenant which was made first through Abraham, renewed through Moses, and embodied in Christ, are at last brought to full realization.

**Verse 4.** Many other blessings flow from direct, untroubled fellowship with God.

*God shall wipe away all tears . . . no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.*—Tears represent human sorrow, tragedy, and evil. In the eternal order, the sorrows and evils of the old order are left behind. One of the most fearful causes of tears is the reality of dying. But in the eternal presence of God death shall be no more. John had already described the abolishing of death and hell which were thrown into the lake of fire (20:14). Not only is death destroyed, there shall never be any mourning, or crying, or pain anymore, for all these former things have passed away. In the new order, all the evils that have burdened and cursed human existence will flee from the presence of God. God has now defeated the enemy and liberated His people in His creation.

**Verse 5.** John saw that the one who was creating the new eternal order was the Creator Himself.

*Behold, I make all things new.*—God emphatically declares that His message is trustworthy and true (v. 5b). He is faithful to His people, true to His word. He declares that He is making all things new. This emphasizes the fact that it is God who is transforming the old into the new.

#### **THE NEW JERUSALEM DESCRIBED (21:21)**

<sup>21</sup>**And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.**

**Verse 21.** When John tried to describe the glory of the new Jerusalem, he could only speak of it in terms of precious stones (vv. 11,18-21).

*The twelve gates were twelve pearls.*—John had already declared that the twelve gates bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve foundations of the city bore the names of the twelve apostles (vv. 12,14). This may be related to the church being built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets (Eph. 2:20). This new city encompasses both the Israel of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament. The building materials of the city are like no human city. It seems that John was trying to use human language to describe the indescribable. The new city, the people of God, will reflect the glory of God, which human language cannot describe.

John described the twelve gates as twelve pearls, each pearl constituting one of the twelve gates. It is interesting to note that a pearl is made from the suffering of an oyster. Perhaps there is a symbolic reference to the opening into this eternal city that is made possible through the suffering of Christ at the cross.

*The street . . . was pure gold.*—In verse 18 the whole city is said to be “pure gold.” The gold is described here as “transparent glass.” In transparent glass any flaw would show up. Therefore, John was describing the purity of the people of God, the new Jerusalem. This purity has been made possible through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Among the Hebrews, precious stones symbolized the divine presence of God. This symbolism is not meant to give the impression of material wealth and luxury, but to point to the glory and holiness of God.

Some interpreters relate parts of chapter 21 to both the millennium and the eternal order.

### **THE NEW JERUSALEM'S GLORY (21:22)**

<sup>22</sup>And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

**Verse 22.** In the age to come, there will be no need of a temple, for God Himself will dwell among His people in unhindered fellowship.

*The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple.*—In the early days of Israel, God was thought to dwell in the tabernacle. Later, after Solomon's time, He was thought to dwell in the Temple. In the age to come there will be no need of a temple for God Himself will dwell among His people.

### **LIFE AND LIGHT IN THE NEW JERUSALEM (22:1-2)**

<sup>1</sup>And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. <sup>2</sup>In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

**Verses 1-2.** The presence of the river of life and the tree of life in the new Jerusalem is a symbolic way of saying that death with all of its results has been abolished and life reigns supreme.

*Water of life . . . the tree of life.*—The symbolism of a river of life is a common one in biblical thought. The psalmist wrote of a river whose streams “make glad the city of God” (Ps. 46:4). Jesus spoke of the living water (John 4:10,14) which He offered to humanity. This is a symbolic way of describing the eternal life in the ages to come.

The fact that the river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb means that God is the source of all life. The river flowing through the middle of the street of the city expresses the centrality of eternal life in

the new Jerusalem.

The tree of life relates to the tree God planted in Eden (Gen. 2:9). God excluded Adam from access to the tree of life because of his sin (Gen. 3:22). In the age to come, because of Jesus' death on the cross, the tree of life is now accessible to all the redeemed.

The tree is pictured as bearing a different kind of fruit each month. The meaning is that the tree will not pass through the ordinary cycles of budding, blossoming, fruit setting, and harvest, giving a crop only twice a year; but will be loaded with fruit every month of the year. This expresses the absolute triumph of life over death.

When John spoke of "the healing of the nations," we are not to think of people in the eternal order needing healing from pain, sickness, and dying. He contrasted this age with all of its suffering and the age to come in which all will be delivered from these earthly afflictions.

Some interpreters relate Revelation 22:1-5 to both the millennium and the eternal order.

#### **JESUS' FINAL WORDS THROUGH JOHN (22:10-12,17)**

<sup>10</sup>And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. <sup>11</sup>He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. <sup>12</sup>And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

.....  
<sup>17</sup>And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Christians should live their lives in such a way that whenever Christ returns they are ready.

**Verse 10.** Because Jesus is coming soon it is important that His message be listened to and heeded by all.

*Seal not the sayings of the prophecy . . . for the time is at hand.*—The message of this prophecy was not for some remote generation, but for the entire Christian church including John's own generation. Therefore, he was not to seal the words of this prophecy. This is a reference to all prophecy of the entire book. John's prophecy has outlined the struggle between God and Satan (chap. 12) which expresses itself wherever humanity organizes in rebellion against God.

The time of the return of Christ was a constant expectation of the early

church. It should be so with every generation of believers. There is the tension between the time being near, and yet being delayed. This should challenge Christians to a greater faithfulness in serving the Lord now.

**Verse 11.** John declared that people should repent now while there is time, because a time will come when repentance will be impossible.

*Unjust . . . filthy . . . righteous . . . holy . . . let him be.*—This sounds like a harsh word which leaves no room for repentance. However, John may have meant that the Lord's coming will be so swift that there will be no time for change. As people are at the moment, so will the Lord find them. John seems to be saying that the Lord will come so quickly that there will be no last minute opportunities for repentance. But, there is time now. So people need to repent while they can.

**Verse 12.** John challenged Christians to persevere and at the same time warn unbelievers that judgment will overtake them soon.

*Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me.*—Degrees of judgment will be on the basis of works (compare 20:12). Patience in tribulation, steadfastness under persecution, and faithfulness to Christ constitute the good works of Christians as revealed in the Revelation (2:10; 3:10-11). It is important how the Christian lives His life here on the earth. It has eternal consequences.

**Verse 17.** This verse is an invitation for all the unredeemed to drink of the water of life while there is time.

*The Spirit and the bride say, Come.*—Some interpret the first part of this verse as an invitation for Jesus to return. The second part of the verse is an invitation through the church to the lost to be saved. Others understand that the Holy Spirit will speak through the church to the world with an invitation to come and drink of the water of life. It may be better to interpret the first part of the verse by the second half and understand the entire invitation to be addressed to the world. The church, the bride, must continually extend the invitation by the power of the Holy Spirit to come to repentance. Those who hear and heed the invitation will be privileged to drink of the water of life.

## TRUTHS FROM THIS LESSON

1. *Christians can rejoice that in the new heaven and earth there will be nothing that separates us from God or one another.*—Christians might as well learn to get along with one another now—we will be spending eternity together.

2. *Life in eternity will be filled with the joyful activity of fellowship with the Lord.*—Because we have received by faith the very holiness and righteousness of Christ, we shall walk freely in the presence of God in

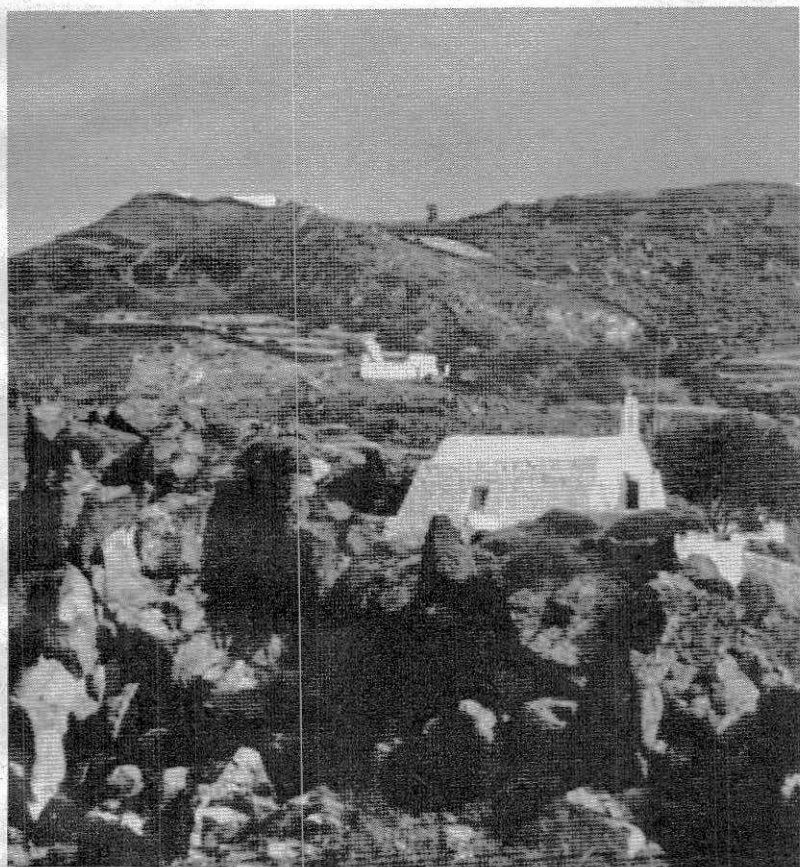


the world to come. If we do not enjoy the presence of God now, how can we expect to enjoy His presence for all eternity?

3. *The hope of the future without pain, sorrow, disease, and tears gives believers courage and comfort to face life's difficulties now.*—As long as we human beings remain in these earthly bodies, there will be pain, suffering and crying. But in eternity we will be delivered.

4. *God's Holy Spirit speaks to the unbelieving world through the church.*—Christians must be careful never to “seal up” the message from the lost.

5. *The way we live our lives now determines the quality of our lives in eternity.*—As Christians, we need to realize how important it is for us to live a righteous life now. Our works will follow us into eternity. God will justly and fairly reward us for our faithfulness.



Church of St. John, located on Patmos.

Ralph McIntyre

# Teaching the Lesson

**Aim:** To lead adults to describe some features of the New Jerusalem and the basis of participation in it, and to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and share in that future blessing

**BEFORE CLASS:** (1) Display the outline of Revelation (Kit item 1). (2) Prepare the poster of the blessings and description of the New Jerusalem called for in Steps 2 and 3 (Kit item 24). (3) Get a supply of hymnals for Step 1. (4) Prepare the sentence poster called for in Step 4.

**KIT:** The *Bible Book Study for Adult Teachers: Resource Kit* contains these helps for this lesson: Item 1—Quarter's Outline: Revelation; Item 24—Poster: Blessings and Description of the New Jerusalem; Item 25—Sentence Poster.

**A LESSON PLAN:** Revelation 21:1-5a; 21:22; 22:1-2, 10-12, 17

**1** *To create interest in Bible study:* Provide hymnals for members. Ask them to find a song about heaven. Let members share their selection. See how many chose the same one. Ask them to read any description of heaven in the hymn. After several minutes, direct members to the focal passage for Revelation's description of heaven.

**2** *To help members describe some blessings of the New Jerusalem:* Make a poster with two major headings (Kit item 24): Blessings of the New Jerusalem (21:1-5a) and Description of the New Jerusalem (21:21-22; 22:1-2). Under the first heading list the following: Newness, Purity, God's presence, Absence of former things. Under the second heading list the following: Gates, Streets, Temple, River, Tree. Cover the second half of the outline. Ask a member to read aloud what John saw in 21:1-2, while members listen for what is said about some blessings of the New Jerusalem. Ask another to read what John heard in 21:3-5a, while members listen for other blessings of that city. Point to the word "newness" and ask members to mention all that is called "new." (Heaven, earth, v. 1; Jerusalem, v. 2; all things, v. 5) Invite members to recall features of the old city called Babylon in chapters 17 and 18 that needed to pass away. (impurity, idolatry, and indulgence) Ask for significance of the passing away of the first heaven and earth, and the absence of any sea. (See both the "Focal Passage Study" in this quarterly and the members' quarterly.)

Call attention to the term "purity," on the poster by asking what John

saw that suggested this quality in the New Jerusalem. (The word "holy;" the symbolism of a bride.) Ask what this means about those who will inhabit heaven. (Consider what 21:27 says.)

Move on to the third blessing in the outline, "God's presence." Explore the use of "tabernacle" in verse 3 by preparing a brief summary of its use in both the Old and New Testaments to express God's presence with His people. (See "Focal Passage Study.")

Ask members to find the former things that will be absent from the New Jerusalem. (Be sure the five items of 21:4 are named.) Ask how such hope for the future has sustained them or someone they know.

**3** *To help members identify some descriptions of the new Jerusalem:* Uncover the half of the poster concerning a description of the New Jerusalem (Kit item 24). Point out that the focal passage samples a portion of a more lengthy description. Ask someone to read aloud 21:21-22, followed by a second person reading 22:1-2. Ask members to listen for what is said about the five features of the city listed on the poster.

Allow for ideas to be shared about each of the features. Refer to the "Focal Passage Study" so you can add to what members point out. Concerning the gates, make sure something is said about the number "twelve" (see 21:12-14) and the material "pearls." Concerning the streets, be sure emphasis is given to the qualities of "pure" and "transparent." Concerning the Temple, emphasize God's dwelling with His people. Relate this to 21:3. Concerning the river, prepare a brief summary of the biblical symbolism of a river of life. (See "Focal Passage Study" on 22:1.) Associate with it the idea of eternal life, both as to its source and its centrality in heaven. Concerning the tree, relate it to Genesis 3:22. Be prepared to discuss leaves for "healing" in light of the perfections of heaven.

**4** *To help members understand the final instructions and warnings of the Book of Revelation:* Ask a member to read the opening instruction to John in Revelation 1:1. Ask another to read the closing one in 22:10. Relate the two by pointing out that what was written in a book and sent to the seven churches was intended from the beginning to be open, understood, and shared. The final instruction confirmed that intention. Ask what was meant by the instruction "seal not." When the idea surfaces about God wanting everyone to have access to the prophecies, remind members of the special promises in 1:3 and 22:7. Point out the need to read, hear, and keep (obey).

Since this is the final lesson from Revelation, you might ask for several to tell what has been one of the chief blessings they have received from the quarter's study.

Ask someone to read the final warnings in 22:11-12. Write on the board this sentence: "How death catches us, eternity will hold us" (Kit item 25). Suggest that the words "the Lord's return" could be substituted for death and the sentence would still be true. Ask in what measure the sentence captures the truth of the warning in verse 11.

Call attention to the warning in verse 12 by asking, In what ways should the expectation of Christ's return make a difference in people's lives? Ask, Is the desire for rewards from Christ at His coming a legitimate motivation for Christian living and ministry? Why or why not?

**5** *To respond to the final invitation in the Book of Revelation:* After reading aloud 22:17, point out from the "Perspectives" that some believe the first half of the verse is addressed to Jesus, but others believe it is addressed to the world. Ask members which meaning seems most likely and why.

Focus on the fact that the verse does indeed extend an invitation to the world. Ask, How do the several voices who speak (Spirit, bride, him that heareth) combine or cooperate in issuing the invitation to today's world? Invite members to ponder such questions as: Will the Spirit invite people to come to Christ without the voice of the church or someone who has heard? Can the church or an individual Christian effectively invite people to Christ apart from the Spirit?

Conclude the lesson with an appeal for any present who have not done so to respond to this invitation. Include an appeal for believers who have become spiritually thirsty to consider a renewed commitment to Christ. *Bible Book Study Guide:* If you use the *Guide*, encourage members to take the posttest over Revelation 17:1 to 22:21 and the pretest over the first unit of Genesis.

If someone accepts Christ as a result of this or any other lesson, would you please let us know? We would like to rejoice with you and pray for the person. Please write: Jim Taulman, MSN 175, 127 Ninth Ave., North, Nashville, TN 37234.



# DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Use the reading with the personal devotional comments in *Open Windows* or the family worship and family Bible study suggestions in *Home Life*.

## JULY

1. Romans 13:1-8
2. Psalm 82:1-8
3. Leviticus 25:1-10
4. 1 Peter 2:11-17
5. Luke 11:1-8
6. Matthew 6:1-9
7. Daniel 6:4-10
8. Luke 18:1-8
9. Mark 1:29-39
10. Acts 12:5-12
11. Colossians 4:2-9
12. Psalm 145:13-21
13. Psalm 73:23-28
14. Romans 8:16-27
15. John 15:1-12
16. Psalm 139:1-10
17. Psalm 42:1-8
18. Micah 6:6-8
19. Psalm 96:1-8
20. Philippians 4:6-9
21. Hebrews 13:8-16
22. Acts 16:16-25
23. Revelation 7:9-17

24. Psalm 118:14-21
25. Psalm 70:1-5
26. 2 Chronicles 7:12-20
27. Psalm 51:1-12
28. Psalm 32:1-11
29. Psalm 130:1-8
30. Judges 10:10-16
31. Nehemiah 1:4-11

## AUGUST

1. Luke 18:9-14
2. Matthew 7:7-12
3. Hebrews 4:14 to 5:7
4. Mark 11:20-26
5. John 14:8-14
6. Psalm 118:1-9
7. Ephesians 3:14-21
8. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
9. Ephesians 6:18-24
10. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to 3:5
11. James 5:7-15
12. Luke 22:31-34
13. Genesis 18:23-32
14. Exodus 32:30-34
15. 1 Samuel 12:18-25
16. Acts 1:8-14
17. Acts 4:23-31
18. Acts 6:1-7
19. Acts 11:5-12



20. Acts 13:1-5
21. Matthew 9:35 to 10:5
22. Matthew 6:9-15
23. Acts 8:26-35
24. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
25. Mark 5:14-20
26. 1 Corinthians 9:13-18
27. 1 Corinthians 9:19-27
28. 2 Kings 7:3-9
29. Psalm 107:1-9
30. Psalm 90:1-12
31. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

20. Philippians 1:3-8
21. Philippians 1:27-30
22. Philippians 2:1-4
23. Philippians 2:5-11
24. Philippians 2:12-16
25. Philippians 4:1-5
26. Philippians 4:10-18
27. Psalm 25:1-9
28. 2 Timothy 3:10-17
29. Matthew 11:25-30
30. Ephesians 4:1-13

### SEPTEMBER

1. James 4:13-17
2. Esther 4:10-16
3. Psalm 118:22-29
4. Ephesians 5:8-16
5. Exodus 20:1-11
6. Genesis 2:8-15
7. Ephesians 4:20-28
8. Nehemiah 4:6-15
9. Proverbs 6:4-11
10. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
11. 1 Timothy 5:1-8
12. Isaiah 55:1-7
13. Jonah 1:1-7
14. Jonah 1:8-17
15. Jonah 2:1-10
16. Jonah 3:1-4
17. Jonah 3:5-10
18. Jonah 4:1-5
19. Jonah 4:6-11

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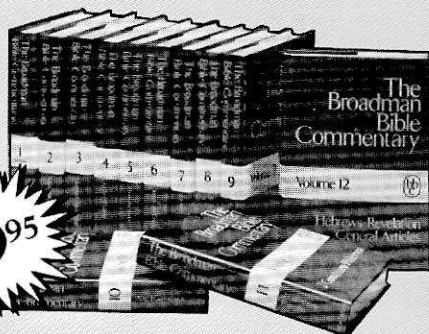
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